

the global scenarios series

script for
cultural awareness

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cultural awareness - script

NARRATOR:

In this program, there will be three sections:

- Cultural conflicts
- Points of view
- and Solutions

After each section, you can pause the program for consideration

CULTURAL CONFLICTS

NARRATOR:

In this scenario, we'll explore the importance of understanding other people's values. We'll also see how different styles of communication can hinder understanding.

Location: restaurant in the Middle East

We join Brian Nelson, a manager for a new Middle East-US joint venture. He's visiting with facilities manager Ahmed Mohammed, an expatriate from a neighboring country.

BRIAN: Whew, it's out there. I mean, Texas is hot, but not that hot.

AHMED: Yes. May I offer you something to drink?

BRIAN:

Sure, that would be great. Why don't you choose something? I must say, Ahmed, I'm very pleased. The facilities are in great shape, I really didn't see any major problems.

AHMED: Thank you.

BRIAN: And operations seem pretty solid, too. But I was thinking we could benefit from a few small changes there.

AHMED: Changes?

BRIAN: Ahmed, I'm a little concerned about the amount of time that some people spend on break. Well, take for example the prayer room. I've tried to become more familiar with Islam, and I know that you pray five times a day. I respect that. But it seems like some of the staff stay in there a long time. I'm worried that if personnel spend too much time on break, our productivity might suffer.

AHMED:

(thinking to himself)

What is he trying to say?

BRIAN: Well, another issue to address is the calendar here. I know that your week is different from ours, your holy day is Friday. But that's an important work day in America. Since we're working together now, we should probably find a way to have some staff here on Fridays.

AHMED:

(thinking to himself)

This is outrageous. What does he think, that we will give up our religion so we can work more?

BRIAN: Any ideas, suggestions?

BRIAN:

(thinking to himself)

Why isn't he saying anything?

BRIAN: Well, why don't you think it over. Or, you come over to my house this weekend, bring your wife. We could have dinner – maybe drinks - and do some brainstorming.

AHMED:

(thinking to himself)

He is suggesting drinks? Most Muslims don't drink! I want to tell him this isn't Texas, but I can't insult my boss.

BRIAN:

(thinking to himself)

Why is he not saying anything? This makes me very uncomfortable.

AHMED:

(thinking to himself)

He is my superior, so I cannot offend him by telling him things he won't like.

NARRATOR:

This joint venture is brand new, but it's already running into problems. What cultural issues are hampering the relationship?

- What cultural factors are hampering the relationship between Ahmed and Brian?
- What issues is Ahmed facing with Brian?
- What issues is Brian facing with Ahmed?
- How can they bridge their differences?

POINTS OF VIEW

AHMED: Mr. Nelson says he admires our culture, but it seems like he doesn't understand what is important to us. I believe he has good intentions. But he is very blunt and not very sensitive to our traditional culture.

Mr. Nelson thinks we should spend less time praying, and work on our holy day. Does Mr. Nelson work on Sundays?

And finally, he suggests we drink alcohol and then talk more about the problems that our religion is causing at work. I really think he needs to learn more about our way of life, and be much more gentle in what he says.

BRIAN: I understand Ahmed's point of view, but at the same time, he needs to understand mine. For starters, we could have avoided a lot of trouble if he just told me what was on his mind.

Ahmed was concerned by the idea of monitoring prayer breaks, but it's the same way back home. Whether it's smoking breaks or surfing the internet, we watch employees to make sure productivity stays high. My job depends on it. I admire the Muslim emphasis on prayer, and I'm not trying to change that. But there needs to be balance.

And he also reacted when I brought up the need to have some staff on Fridays. In the West, we have people working on Sundays, which is our holy day. I mean if we didn't, we wouldn't have any hotels or restaurants open. In both cases, Ahmed had concerns, but he neither shared them with me nor presented any alternative solutions.

And as for alcohol, some Muslims do drink socially. If he doesn't, he needs to tell me. I've been on assignment in almost a half dozen countries, all with wildly different beliefs, and I depend on my local contacts to help me learn local customs.

I understand Ahmed's respect for his culture. But he needs to know that my value system is equally valid, and we would better understand each other's cultures a lot faster if he would be more direct.

Here's are some points to consider on values and communication:

- While people often share common values, they sometimes prioritize them differently. While Brian and Ahmed both stress productivity, it's comparatively more important for Brian
- People have different communication styles: being direct is more efficient but it can be disrespectful. Indirect communication is more diplomatic but can frustrate and mislead.

SOLUTIONS

Location: restaurant in the Middle East

NARRATOR:

Bearing in mind these issues, let's see how Ahmed and Brian could have handled the situation differently.

BRIAN:

(thinking to himself)

Be diplomatic, and don't mention religion.

(to Ahmed)

Ahmed, you're working with Americans now. Our calendar is different from yours. Can you suggest a way to find some staff here on Fridays, people who wouldn't mind being here then.

AHMED:

(thinking to himself)

Be more direct... *Khair al-umoor awsaatihaa*... the best of things is the middle way

(to Brian)

Well, that is very difficult for any Muslim, for Friday is the most holy day. But...we have some workers who are not Muslim. They could be there.

BRIAN:

Great, I need you to put together a list of these employees. And also in my culture, it's important to set a time limit for employee breaks. Do you think fifteen minutes per break, whether prayer or just coffee, would that be fair?

AHMED:

Yes, yes, I think it would.

BRIAN:

There are some other things we can discuss together, *in sha'Allah*. Shall we choose a good time and place for another meeting?

AHMED:

That would be great, great.

NARRATOR:

It's easy to spot differences in appearance, but our values and priorities are often hidden within. You need to cultivate awareness and sensitivity to understand our world's diverse cultures, such as the Middle East.

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exercises

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Questions for discussion: Compare your ratings with those of your acquaintances. Which results were similar? Which were different? Regarding the results that differed, what might account for the difference? How does this change how you view yourself and your cultural orientation?

Exercise #2 - The Value of Values

Objective: increase cultural awareness by exploring cultural variations within a group

Participants: small teams of approximately 5 people

Within a society, our values tend to be similar - or are they? Even within a particular culture, there can be noticeable variations in values.

Instructions: Form a small group of approximately 5 people. Each team member lists what he/she considers the 5 most important things in life. Team members then prioritize their values, 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important.

Team members then take turns reading their values list to the group. If you share a value with another team member, make note of it, including the ranking (1 to 5). If someone reveals a value not on your list, add it to the bottom of your list.

Conclusion: The exercise ends when all members of each team have listed and shared their values. All participants should then meet to compare and contrast their results.

Questions for discussion: What was most surprising to you? What similarities in values did you observe? What were the differences? Which value was the most common in your group? What were some values held by only one group member? How might your values come in conflict with other team members? How might you bridge these differences?

Exercise #3 - Cultural Joint Venture

Objective: gain cultural research and strategy skills

Participants: teams of 4 or 5 people

Instructions: Participants are divided into appropriately sized groups, perhaps four or five people. The group is to prepare research for an imaginary joint venture between two dramatically different cultures, such as India and the United States. The facilitator may choose to assign cultures that are particularly relevant to the group, and should also specify the length and/or depth of the report.

Instructions to participants: The group is to prepare detailed research on the two cultures, focusing primarily on values, religious beliefs and communication styles. One recommended resource is www.culturegrams.com. Other information is widely available on the internet.

The group's research should identify the following:

- a) differences in values, religion and communication styles
- b) potential conflict in values, religion and communication styles
- c) recommended strategies for bridging differences and avoiding conflict

Conclusion: All teams should meet to compare and contrast their findings. Participants can be evaluated on the depth and quality of research, quality of cultural analysis, and usefulness of recommended strategies.

Questions for discussion: What are the similarities in values between the two cultures? What are the differences? What are the religious parallels and disparities between the two cultures? What are the similarities and differences in communication styles? What strategies do you recommend for leveraging the similarities, and bridging the differences?

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role plays

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General Instructions for Role Play

Role plays are “what if” scenarios in which participants act out certain characters in certain situations.

Through this process, you’ll help your participants:

- Analyze problems from various perspectives
- Improve problem-solving skills
- Develop team work and cooperation

To do:

Decide objective: Decide whether you’re developing skills, assessing skills or both. If you’re assessing skills, establish quantifiable competency level. Explain clearly to participants the objective of a role play, to ensure maximum learning. Ask participants if they have any questions or reservations about a role play.

Customize role plays: Whenever possible, customize role plays to your organization or situation. For example, if you work for a company, use your company’s name in the role play and reference real partners or clients.

Facilitator’s role: You can either help participants, or challenge them by adding additional obstacles. In any event, whenever possible help your participants recognize learning opportunities.

Put players at ease: Some people are uncomfortable with role-playing. Ask participants if they have previous experience with role plays. Put them at ease by telling them they’re only pretending, and that there’s no right or wrong. It’s fun and a learning experience! It’s a good idea to start with simple exercises, then build up to more complicated role plays.

Note that players will need some time to review their characters and prepare for the exercise.

Team assignments: It’s best if the facilitators assign players to teams. Being outside the comfort zone will promote greater learning.

Conclusion: Watch the role play and critique it afterwards. Feedback should be specific. Learning experiences can also be summarized in reflective reports, which can be distributed and shared with the group.

1. Time For Values

Objective: to increase awareness of how external pressures can come in conflict with values

Participants: teams of 3 people

Instructions: All participants are divided into 3 groups. Ask group C to leave the room. Participants from groups A and B are paired off to form sub-groups of two people, who are given the secret instruction below.

After the sub-groups of two people have read the secret instruction, the facilitator pretends to change the plan and tells participants from group C that they will join the existing pairs, thus creating sub-groups of 3 people each.

Secret instruction to participants A and B: Tell participant C that you will be working on a group project together, such as researching the culture of another country. This project is imaginary. You will need to meet regularly to work on this project. Ask participant C when he or she can meet, and more importantly, absolutely cannot meet. Be sure to ask about weekdays, weekends, and evenings, 7 days a week, 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., etc.

After receiving availability information from participant C, participants A and B tell participant C they can only meet at the time that is least convenient for participant C. Be specific and realistic – e.g. Sunday mornings at 7 a.m.

Engage participant C, but remain stubborn and unyielding. Continue the discussion as long as possible, until a) participant C agrees to your request, b) participant C refuses to discuss any more or c) the facilitator decides the role play is complete.

Conclusion: The facilitator reveals the secret instructions to group C. All participants convene to compare and contrast their experiences.

Questions for discussion: For “C” participants, what was your experience like it? What value or values were in conflict, such as work, family, religion, recreation, etc.? How did it feel to be pressured to compromise on your values?

All participants: How could you have balanced participant C’s values with the project? What situations have you experienced in which your values came in conflict with external pressures or the values of others? What strategies can you suggest for avoiding conflicts in values?

Evaluation: Participants should be evaluated primarily on a) their ability to identify conflicts in values, and b) their ability to solve problems and suggest ways to avoid conflicts in values.

2. Where's the Conflict?

Objective: to increase cultural awareness by learning to probe cultural situations

Participants: 2-person teams

Instructions: The members of the 2-person teams should alternate being player A or B. There are 3 role plays below to choose from.

The Middle East

Secret instructions for participant A: You are on a new assignment in the Middle East for a global plastics company.

Your associate is in charge of local operations, and you suggest an informal meeting to break the ice. Invite your associate to your home this weekend for a barbeque – your pork ribs are “world famous” You can enjoy beers by your swimming pool. Noticing your associate has sprained his ankle, you suggest his wife drive.

Your goal is to determine a day and time that works for both of you. If a certain time doesn't work, suggest another time until you find a time that works for both of you.

Secret instructions for participant B: You work for a global plastics company, and are in charge of local operations in the Middle East.

Your foreign associate will invite you to a barbeque, and his/her invitation is loaded with cultural conflicts:

barbequed pork	In our culture we don't eat pork because it's considered unclean.
swimming pool setting	In our culture we believe in dressing modestly so bathing attire would be inappropriate with a co-worker
drinking beers	In our culture we don't drink alcohol.
your wife will drive	In our culture women don't drive automobiles.

Decline your associates invitation, giving vague responses “Thank you, but that will not be possible,” “We'll see,” or “God willing.”

Only if your associate asks why it's difficult to schedule a get-together, you may say "we have our culture."

Only if your associate asks for information or insights about your culture, may you reveal the cultural conflicts listed above.

Asia

Secret instructions for participant A: You are on a new assignment in Asia for a global pharmaceuticals company.

A couple action items you must complete today are expediting an initial meeting with a potential local partner, and setting up your office.

Ask your associate to send to the partner a hand-crafted hunting knife; these are very popular gifts in your home country. Ask your associate to request a business meeting after the gift has been received.

To set up your office, tell your associate you'll need some help moving the desk to your preferred corner. Also request that a painter be hired to paint one wall red to "liven up the room."

Your goal is to determine a time today that works for both of you.

Secret instructions for participant B: You are Asian, and work in the regional headquarters of a global pharmaceuticals company.

A new foreign associate will ask for your help in scheduling an appointment with an important potential partner, and in setting up his/her office. There will be many cultural conflicts, as outlined below:

Knife as gift	In our culture, a knife isn't an inappropriate gift. It symbolizes severing a relationship.
Speed up relationship	In our culture, you must take time to build a relationship. Gift or no gift, you can't speed things up with Mr. Ong.
Moving desk	In our culture, the concept of Feng Shui is very important. The placement of your desk would be in an unlucky manner.
Red wall	In our culture, the significance of colors is important. Red signifies anger or severing a relationship.

Decline your associate’s request for help, giving vague responses such as “maybe,” “we’ll see,” and “it might be difficult today,”

Only if your associate asks why it’s difficult to schedule a time, you may state “we have our culture.”

Only if your associate asks for information or insights about your culture, may you reveal the cultural conflicts listed above.

Latin America

Secret instructions for participant A: You’re a senior marketing executive for global telecommunications company. You’re on a new assignment in Latin America.

You want to set up an appointment with your company’s regional president to discuss marketing ideas. You suggest the three of you get together and brainstorm marketing ideas at a working lunch this week. Alternatively, the president is throwing a party at Friday evening at 8 p.m., and you could arrive a little early to discuss ideas over cocktails.

Your goal is to get the marketing manager to schedule a meeting with the regional president.

Secret instructions for participant B: You’re Latin American, and the local marketing manager for global telecommunications company.

A new senior marketing executive has recently arrived from overseas, and is on assignment in your office. He/she is asking you to set up an appointment with your company’s regional president. Unfortunately, the requests are loaded with the cultural conflicts below:

brainstorming	In our culture, hierarchy is very important. It would be inappropriate for me to “brainstorm” and publicly advise my superiors.
working lunch	In our culture, lunch and early afternoon is often reserved for leisurely relationship-building lunches, family time, or siestas. A working lunch isn’t appropriate.
perceptions of time	In our culture, it’s considered extremely rude to arrive on time for a party. You should arrive 2 to 3 hours late to allow the hostess time to prepare.

Evade the executive's requests, giving vague responses such as "maybe," "we'll see," or "I'll look into it."

Only if your associate asks why it's difficult to schedule a get-together, you may state "we have our culture."

Only if your associate asks for information or insights about your culture, may you reveal the cultural conflicts listed above.

Conclusion: The role play ends when a) participant A successfully uncovers the cultural conflicts or b) the facilitator ends the role play.

Questions for Discussion:

Participant A: Were you able to uncover the cultural obstacles that blocked your objective? How? What did you learn about hidden cultural obstacles? How would this affect how you work with other cultures?

Participant B: What was it like to have participant A be insensitive to your culture? What did you learn about hidden cultural obstacles? How would this affect how you work with other cultures?

3. Let's Make a Deal!

Prerequisite: Participants must first complete the exercise called The Value of Values. This is contained in the exercises section of this program, and also below for your convenience.

Objective: increase cultural awareness by contemplating one's own values

Participants: small teams of about 5 people

Alternate instructions: Rather than having team members compete against each other, per below, the facilitator can arrange competition between teams; the team that compiles the most value points wins.

The role play below focuses on a global research and develop team for a medical technology company; the facilitator may substitute a real-life project or scenario instead.

Instructions to participants: You and your team members are forming a new global research and development team for a medical technology company.

Based on the results of The Value of Values, your team will create a list compiling all values of team members. The team members must then agree to a list of 4 team values, i.e. – a mission statement of values.

Each team member will be required to sacrifice one or more values, and the objective for each team member is to sacrifice the least important, and as few, values as possible. Team members may negotiate with each other, either one-on-one or in a group, to try to ensure their most important values are on the group list. The list of 4 group values is then determined by voting on the compiled list of group values.

Scoring: If a team member's #1 value is on the compiled list, the team member gets 5 points. If the member's #2 value is on the list, the group member gets 4 points, etc.

Example: Susan's values are, by rank:

1. Family (5 points)
2. Money (4 points)
3. Religion (3 points)
4. Health (2 points)
5. Recreation (1 points)

If family, money and health are on the group's compiled list of values, Susan gets $5 + 4 + 2$ points = 11 points total.

If a team member has values that are not on the compiled list, work obligations will prevent him/her from fulfilling that value. For example, if "family" is not on the list, team members will have no time for family. If "money" is not on the list, team members will work without pay.

Conclusion: The role play ends when each team has finalized its values list. Sub-groups present their results to all participants.

Questions for discussion: What 4 values comprised your group's final list? For each group member, which value(s) did you fight for? Which value(s) did you lose? How does that feel? If this role play were real life, how would you react to the value conflict?

Evaluation: Participants can be evaluated on the detail in which they consider and describe their reaction to conflict in values – i.e. having one or more of their values failing to make the group list. Participants can also be evaluated in their problem-solving techniques in how they might have their values work with the group.

The Value of Values (prerequisite exercise for Let's Make a Deal role play)

Objective: increase cultural awareness by exploring cultural variations within a group

Participants: small teams of approximately 5 people

Within a society, our values tend to be similar - or are they? Even within a particular culture, there can be noticeable variations in values.

Instructions: Form a small group of approximately 5 people. Each team member lists what he/she considers the 5 most important things in life. Team members then prioritize their values, 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important.

Team members then take turns reading their values list to the group. If you share a value with another team member, make note of it, including the ranking (1 to 5). If someone reveals a value not on your list, add it to the bottom of your list.

Conclusion: The exercise ends when all members of each team have listed and shared their values. All participants should then meet to compare and contrast their results.

Questions for discussion: What was most surprising to you? What similarities in values did you observe? What were the differences? Which value was the most common in your group? What were some values held by only one group member? How might your values come in conflict with other team members? How might you bridge these differences?

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CULTURAL AWARENESS

- Brian was not culturally prepared to work with Ahmed and his culture.
- What errors did he make?
- What could Brian have done to be better prepared?
- Describe a situation in which you encountered a cultural misunderstanding or conflict. What lessons did you learn from the situation?
- If you received an assignment to work with another culture, how would you prepare yourself?

VALUES

- What is your cultural background (e.g. nationality, ethnic group, etc.)?
- How would you describe the main values of your culture? Have you come in conflict with another culture?
- What was the result, and what did you learn from the experience?
- What are your most important personal values?
- Describe a situation in which your values differed from those of another person (for example a co-worker, family member, etc.) What was the result, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Would you be willing to work on Saturdays? On Sundays? On important holidays? If not, why not? If yes, under what circumstances?

COMMUNICATION

- Ahmed failed to explain his culture to Brian. What should he have told Brian about his values and beliefs?
- How did Ahmed's failure to communicate worsen the conflict with Brian?
- How could he have helped Brian understand his culture without offending Brian?

DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

- When communicating with others, do you tend to be direct or indirect?
- Is it more important to get the job done, or avoid offending someone or hurting their feelings?
- In what situations would you tend to be more direct?
- In what situations would you be more indirect?
- Circumstances can cause people to be direct or indirect. Give an example of a situation in which you wish another person had been more direct and to the point. In contrast, give an example in which you wish someone had told you something more diplomatically.