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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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With the increasing globalisation and diversification of societies, we are increasingly dealing with people from other cultures. Intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as an essential skill for interaction across diverse backgrounds. It involves understanding and adapting to different communication patterns, norms, and values to navigate cultural differences successfully. For example, greetings, personal space, and acceptable topics of conversation may differ from culture to culture. Without this competence, there is a risk of misunderstanding and misinterpreting behaviours and values, which can lead to conflicts, whether in everyday life, in business or in education.

Cultural dimensions are aspects or characteristics that help describe and compare cultures. They are often used to understand and analyse cultural differences and similarities. Cultural dimensions are not absolute, but rather exist on a continuum, meaning that cultures can vary in their positioning along each dimension. For example, the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures or the different ways in which power distance is perceived are important aspect of intercultural understanding that can significantly impact intercultural communication. Whereas individualism and collectivism affect how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships with others, power distance reflects how individuals within a culture perceive and respond to authority, hierarchy, and social inequality. Recognising that individuals from different cultures may prioritise either personal independence or group harmony, accept or rather reject hierarchical structures and authority figures on, helps to navigate interactions and appreciate diverse perspectives.

As said, such cultural differences affect communication styles and behaviours and an important concept in this regard is that of high context and low context cultures. This dimension refers to the extent to which meaning is implicitly understood within the cultural context (high-context) versus explicitly communicated through words (low-context). Whereas people in high-context cultures, such as some Asian and Arab countries, rely heavily on context, shared experiences, and nonverbal cues to convey meaning, other cultures, known as low-context cultures, countries such as the US, Scandinavia, and Germany, tend to rely more on explicit and direct communication. Understanding these differences can contribute to effective cross-cultural communication. Particularly, nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language also vary across cultures, and understanding these nuances is crucial to avoid misinterpretation. Developing cultural awareness involves recognising and understanding one's own cultural values, biases, and assumptions. It requires learning about and respecting the cultural perspectives, beliefs, and practices of

others. Ultimately, intercultural competence enhances our ability to engage positively with others, bridge cultural gaps, and build meaningful relationships across cultures.