MOMAP TOOL

Find your sensitive zones

MOMAP Dimension: Challenges

MOMAP Domain: Cultural Differences

Cultural Differences refers to the difficulties that arise from the difference between cultural reference frames. Differences include: gender roles, different approaches to hierarchy, differences in ways of thinking and differences in day-to-day practices.

Target group:

Type of mobility:	Implementation phase:
Geographic Mobility: X	Before: X
Social Mobility: X	During: X
	After: X

Duration:

Number of sessions: 1

Time: **20 minutes**

Tool objectives / short description:

To identify the sensitive zones of the participant in terms of cultural differences: where would the biggest challenges lie? This will indicate the most cherished cultural values and norms held by the participant.

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Sessions:

SESSION 1
Session Objectives:
To identify the sensitive zones of the participant in terms of cultural differences: where would the biggest challenges lie? This will indicate the most cherished cultural values and norms held by the participant
Time: 35-45 minutes
Materials: images (adapted for the participant's mobility project), handouts for emotions and values, pen
Preparation needed: the guide must have some familiarity with the cultural background of the participant, the destination environment, and must have a good understanding of some basic concepts such as ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, enculturation, culture shock, decentration.
References: this activity was developed by Elan Interculturel based on Margalit Cohen-Emerique's intercultural approach, in particular the method of critical incidents.
Step-by-step activity:
Lead in: (5 min)
You can introduce the activity by linking it to the results of your participant for Challenges – Cultural Differences. The activity can serve as a start of the meeting or can follow any other task.
Activity 1: decentration by pictures (10 min)
Ask the participant to take a look at the pictures and choose the three that make them react the strongest. It does not matter if the reaction is positive or negative, we are only looking for the strength of the reaction. Encourage the participant to make choices based on "gut feelings" rather than in-depth reflection. Once the selection is made, work on the selected pictures and ask the participant to answer three questions: What is the element in the picture that triggered the strongest reaction? What is the participant's own value/norm that the picture questions? What are the values that motivate the behaviour of people from that other culture?

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Follow up discussion: (15-25 min)

Go through your participant's answers for the three questions and the three pictures. Try to ensure that the participant does not answer the questions "all at once" but one at a time, sequentially. In this task the hand-out can be used as a resource.

Be particularly precise when it comes to the question about the participant's own values; don't let her/him "get away" with very superficial or general answers, ask her/him to be very concrete.

When it comes to the values of others, be aware that the participant may not have sufficient knowledge or information to give good guesses. Here it may be your task to identify the corresponding values. This implies that you have to be well informed about the cultural practices you chose to illustrate with the pictures.

After you have discussed the questions, ask your participant why s/he thinks you did this activity – what does this activity illustrate? This will be your opportunity to discuss concepts of culture shock and the mechanism of decentration – a powerful source of learning from culture shock experiences. To do this, you can find the background information and hand-outs in the corresponding sections below.

Possible modifications:

Adjust the selection of pictures according to the life history and mobility project of your participant. For instance, in the case of geographical mobility you can choose pictures that illustrate the destination country. In the case of social mobility, use general pictures illustrating different cultures, but be careful to make the connection explicit between the activity and cultural differences to expect during social mobility.

Closing up the session: (5 min)

Talk about cultural differences, cultural shock that could be expected/ or actually did happen already in the new environment. Reinforce the learning point of the session:

   a) Strong emotional reactions can illustrate the encounter with cultural patterns / values which are in contradiction with one's own values and norms

   b) Reactions based upon such negative emotions or holding on to these negative emotions can have a negative impact (repeated and enduring conflicts or prejudice).

   c) Such reactions always illustrate a gap between two sets of values and not the inherent strangeness or weirdness of the other.

   d) In such situations it is useful to try to identify which of our values have been affected and what may be the values behind the behaviour / practice of the other culture.

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Ideas for homework:

If you are working in the 'during' phase of mobility, you can assign your participant to bring you pictures or even concrete experiences, situations of the new environment which s/he finds difficult or shocking. You can then do a similar analysis, as described above, exploring her/his emotions and values / norms touched by the situation. If you are working with their own situation you can move one step forward and explore what reaction the participant had, and explore possible alternative reactions.

Hints for the coach:

This activity only works if you manage to go beyond a superficial level. This implies that

a) The participant responds openly to the pictures and does not declare that all of them are totally fine or usual for him/her. To avoid this, reassure the participant that it is perfectly normal to be surprised, or even shocked by some cultural practices different from our own.

b) When identifying values you manage to go beyond superficial discussion. Also, be very strict when talking about own values – people sometimes have the reaction of talking about others' values.

Finally, the pictures must be well chosen, to be sufficiently provoking, but not unrealistic, still being characteristic of some domain / subculture of the new environment.

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Closing:

Evaluation of the tool:

The tool has been useful if:

a) The participant understood that the perception and interpretation of "others" is always culturally mediated: it is filtered through one's own cultural values, norms, expectations

b) The participant became aware of some of the values that are very central in her/his own value system

c) The participant realised that threats to these central cultural values / norms that s/he holds dear can trigger strong emotional responses

To find out whether you have reached these goals you can ask the participant to tell you what s/he has learnt through this activity and how can s/he use what s/he learnt during the mobility project.

Combination with other tools:

This tool is connected to awareness of relativity; in fact, it can be used to raise awareness of cultural relativity.

Suggested readings on the topic:

Kroeber, A. & Kluckhohn, C. 1952. Culture. New York: Meridian Books
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland 1995 Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology London: Pluto Press
Hall, E.T. 1990 (orig 1959) The Silent Language. Anchor Books
Hall, E.T. 1999 (orig 1966) The Hidden Dimension Anchor Books
Hall, E.T 1989 Beyond Culture. Anchor Books
Geertz, Clifford 1973 The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays. New York: Basic
Geertz, Clifford 1984 Anti-Anti-Relativism. 1983 Distinguished Lecture. American Anthropologist 82:263-278
Margalit Cohen-Emerique 1999. Le choc culturel, méthode de formation et outil de recherche. In: Demorgon,J., Lipiansky,E.,M. (eds) Guide de l'interculturel en formation. Paris, Retz. Pp 301-315

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Handouts:

Handout 1 – illustration for series of pictures

photo by istolethevhttp://www.flickr.com/photos/istolethetv/

Photo by Davidlohr Bueso http://www.flickr.com/photos/daverugby83/

Photo by cynicalreview's blog http://cynicalreview.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/beauty-pageant.jpg

Phot by Harry Lawford http://www.flickr.com/photos/herry/

photo by Viktória Jakó

Photo by Jens Rantil http://www.flickr.com/photos/ztyx/

photo by Luigino Bracci http://www.flickr.com/photos/lubrio/

Photo by nathanmac87 http://www.flickr.com/photos/nathanmac87/7491619876/sizes/o/in/photolist-cq1vzW-6ZcKxL-dKhNfr-9XXGux-8w947L-2jUgNC-Ev1aU-ckAYsW-6KUQRR-9XxHk9-9Xve2R-ewfg67-4ZsbEh-4ZnZZp-acikN-ekCipB-FmCLb-5EG4MF-eJDtn7-7nfux3-4U7247-53XWxU-4UWTy5-5RHMjL-7pcyj8-cbk3m-cbjQQ-363F5o-7neWQT-eZbjS4-71x4gP-gKFXc-34MZR7-8Q4raJ-ewfg41-exCtSa-iah1s-4ZpF6F-6YXEz6-6Z3s65-34N4ML-8RobG8-6YYedR-ejLzc3-gqYU1-7zSaS5-7zKwhH-7eecAw-cK8sZE-7efMah-7zS1aW/

Handout 2 – emotions and values

	Own emotions	Own values	Values of the protagonists in the pictures
1st picture			
2nd picture			
3rd picture			

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Handout 3 – definition of culture shock

Culture shock is an interaction with a person or object from a different culture, set in a specific space and time, which provokes negative or positive cognitive and affective reactions, a sensation of loss of reference points, a negative representation of oneself and feeling of lack of approval that can give rise to uneasiness and anger.

Based on MARGALIT COHEN-EMERIQUE 1999. Le choc culturel, méthode de formation et outil de recherche. In: Demorgon,J., Lipiansky,E.,M. (eds) Guide de l'interculturel en formation. Paris, Retz. Pp 301-315. **8**

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Background information / theory:

Nutshell introduction to Margalit Cohen-Emerique's intercultural approach and the technique of decentration

A first tradition of intercultural trainings focused on the transfer of information on specific cultures: how to understand Japanese use of space, Hungarian sense of humour, French gastronomy, Belgian identity etc. At the beginning of her career, Cohen-Emerique also delivered trainings for French social workers to be able to cater for the needs of their clients newly settling in France as part of the Jewish diaspora. However, she observed that her trainings based on history, cultural anthropology, identity psychology did not have a great impact on the practice of the social workers she trained: in some situations they did not apply the newly acquired knowledge on the specificity of this cultural group while in others they tried to stick to elements of the transferred information even when it did not seem to fit the context of the concrete client. Cohen-Emerique's observations are in line with general critiques towards what is called a culture-specific approach:

- on the one hand it is impossible to give valid and permanent information on cultural norms, values, behaviours that are generalizable across whole cultural groups and their members because of the dynamic nature and perpetual changes characterising each culture, and also the diversity of individual experiences of their members.

- on the other hand it seems tremendously difficult to apply well this type of information into concrete situations: somehow the anthropological knowledge is difficult to transpose into the everyday embodied interactions.

To respond to the challenges she identified Cohen-Emerique devised an approach and a methodology that for the last thirty years has become widely used all over France in the training and supervision of professionals of the social and health sectors working with people from "other cultures".
Cohen-Emerique's intercultural approach is based on three steps, each based on different training methods and tools and requiring the development of different competences from the professionals.

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a) Decentration

The first step – decentration - is based on the recognition that if there is a conflict it is not the mere consequence of the culturally different other, but rather the interaction between two different cultural reference frames. Decentration thus invites to the exploration of the involvement of one's own cultural – including professional - models, practices, norms and how they enter in interaction with the values / norms / expectations of the other.

The recognition that decentration is necessarily the first step stems from the observation that our cultural frames of reference act as filters – think of the metaphor of glasses as a representation of culture – biasing how we see the outside world. Decentration makes it possible for us to lift these cultural glasses just enough to be able to see their colour, their shape, i.e. to better understand how we filter our reading of the other person. Moreover, it is much easier to systematise and give meaning to our knowledge on other cultures once we have acquired some perspective of our own. For instance it is easier to understand (which does not mean to accept) cultural taboos concerning meals - what is edible and what is not - once we have discovered that our own culture also draws such a line: maybe for us it is oysters and snails that are usually not categorised as food, maybe it is pork, maybe all beings that have eyes but there is usually such a line, and the question is merely where the line is. Finally it is our nature that we tend to consider ourselves – our own culture – in more complexity while easily accepting simplifications of others – other cultures. Gaining more awareness of our own culture first may help us become aware of this bias and maintain less simplistic assumptions about others. This first phase implies the acquisition of tools helping self-awareness, self-perception. A core skill is the capacity to take a step back from a potentially delicate situation and try to resist the need of immediately looking for the answer and judgement in the other ("how can they oppress the women by forcing them to hide their face and body curves?") and instead turn the attention to ourselves ("why is it so important for me to choose the way I want to dress? Why is it important that women show their face and body curves?").

b) Reference frame of the other

Once we have gained awareness of our own cultural norms, values, patterns, we are ready to open our eyes on the other. The objectives of this phase are:

- Gaining a more elaborate idea of the cultural values, norms, patterns of people from other cultures, going beyond simplistic assumptions and stereotypes;

- Becoming aware of the multitude of factors that may influence the cultural reference frame of the other.

In this phase professionals acquire tools from cultural anthropologists to observe, interview, analyse cultural patterns, and create "grids" that facilitate the taking into account of contextual elements (e.g. for professionals working with immigrants a useful "grid" would help to determine to what extent the client is "integrated" or "acculturated" in the new society, so as to avoid pinning on her/him cultural values and patterns of her culture of origin which she does not follow anymore). Key skills in this phase are:

- Daring to be curious: Cohen-Emerique observed that often professionals stay with received ideas, assumptions about other cultures because simply they don't dare to be curious and investigative by the fear of invading the other's privacy and their right to be 'invisible' as a cultural entity different from the mainstream. For this reason, professionals often do not dare to ask the client when they face a behaviour / norm that is strange for them, even when they would have had a chance to actually understand that behaviour or norm.

- Observation (e.g. being able to notice in Japan the lack of handshakes as a typical greeting ritual).

- Connecting the observations in a systemic way to our set of knowledge and practices (e.g. widening our representations of what a greeting ritual can be by slowly learning the delicate nuances of the bow).

c) Negotiation

The third step, negotiation implies finding a solution to a concrete problem in a way that respects as much as possible the identities of both parties. In this phase professionals acquire tools for communication and negotiation. A variety of attitudes and skills can be developed to improve our negotiation:

- Active listening, non violent communication: listening to the other, not just focusing on what we want to achieve and where our own reservation line is.

- Resistance to the need for closure: avoiding our genuine wish to close communication and end the relation in emotionally challenging, threatening situations.

- Awareness of non verbal communication (our own and that of others).

- Capacity to move between personal and professional spheres to maintain the relation: when there is a blockage in the process, realise that the shift between professional and personal registers can become a resource in maintaining the connection.

The activity "find your sensitive zones" is meant to give an easy practical introduction to decentration. However, to fully be able to practice decentration more training is necessary. The activity is merely an illustration and a means to transfer the basic concepts.

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