Developing Hospitality Managers' Intercultural Communication Abilities: The Cocktail Party Simulation

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Abstract
The ever increasing globalization of the hospitality industry and movement of people across international borders heightens the need for intercultural education and training. However, few intercultural training materials have a hospitality focus, and customized instruction is costly. The tool presented here helps reduce cultural barriers by providing a low-cost, hospitality-specific intercultural simulation that hospitality practitioners and educators can use with a wide variety of audiences. In the simulation, participants play the roles of members of three companies, each from a different fictional culture. At the simulated cocktail party that opens a series of important business meetings concerning a joint venture in the hospitality industry, participants establish business relationships and strive to overcome cultural differences that may impede those relationships. A debriefing discussion after the event reinforces the following key themes: Cultural values are relative, not absolute; Intercultural communication involves emotional as well as rational responses; Invisible cultural differences, such as values, attitudes, and beliefs, are more difficult to handle than visible differences, such as manners, customs, and rituals; Deciding who adapts to whom-and how-is the greatest challenge in intercultural interactions; and Cultural identity is multidimensional, involving far more than nationality alone. During the debriefing, participants apply these themes to their own work lives and past experiences interacting with culturally diverse colleagues, clients, guests, and business associates. Several follow-up options are possible to help participants use the knowledge they have gained. This report provides full instructions so that hospitality practitioners and educators can use the Cocktail Party Simulation in corporate-level management development programs, property-level training, executive education seminars, and college courses. Suggestions for adapting the simulation to different audiences, situations, and segments of the hospitality industry are included.

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by Daphne A. Jameson, Ph.D.

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by Daphne A. Jameson, Ph.D.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ever increasing globalization of the hospitality industry and movement of people across international borders heightens the need for intercultural education and training. However, few intercultural training materials have a hospitality focus, and customized instruction is costly. The tool presented here helps reduce cultural barriers by providing a low-cost, hospitality-specific intercultural simulation that hospitality practitioners and educators can use with a wide variety of audiences.

In the simulation, participants play the roles of members of three companies, each from a different fictional culture. At the simulated cocktail party that opens a series of important business meetings concerning a joint venture in the hospitality industry, participants establish business relationships and strive to overcome cultural differences that may impede those relationships.

A debriefing discussion after the event reinforces the following key themes:

- Cultural values are relative, not absolute;
- Intercultural communication involves emotional as well as rational responses;
- Invisible cultural differences, such as values, attitudes, and beliefs, are more difficult to handle than visible differences, such as manners, customs, and rituals;
- Deciding who adapts to whom—and how—is the greatest challenge in intercultural interactions; and
- Cultural identity is multidimensional, involving far more than nationality alone.

During the debriefing, participants apply these themes to their own work lives and past experiences interacting with culturally diverse colleagues, clients, guests, and business associates. Several follow-up options are possible to help participants use the knowledge they have gained.

This report provides full instructions so that hospitality practitioners and educators can use the Cocktail Party Simulation in corporate-level management development programs, property-level training, executive education seminars, and college courses. Suggestions for adapting the simulation to different audiences, situations, and segments of the hospitality industry are included.
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The hospitality industry presents a wide array of intercultural communication challenges even for those who are knowledgeable about other cultures. Consider the following examples:

• A hotel company selects a Canadian of Chinese descent to head up its efforts to expand into China, believing that his command of the language and knowledge of Chinese culture will ensure success. Despite these advantages, however, the expatriate has difficulty adjusting, both personally and professionally.

• A resort manager in Hawaii trains her staff to extend warm, personal, Aloha service to guests from all over the world. She is dismayed, though, when she learns that such service makes guests from the Middle East feel uncomfortable.

• Three business partners—one British, one Kenyan, and one Indian—join together to start a restaurant chain, believing that their long-time friendship as former college roommates will offset any cultural differences. They discover, though, that their different concepts of business values and goals impede their progress.

Situations like these underscore the need for those in the hospitality industry to recognize the complexities of cultural differences and to take them into account continuously. Though it is necessary to handle the surface cultural differences, it is even more important to recognize the underlying differences—in values, thought patterns, and concepts—that can undermine business relationships.
Intercultural training programs are one way to increase knowledge and to influence attitudes, which affect commitment and motivation.\(^1\) Hospitality practitioners see a strong need for intercultural education and training,\(^2\) but several barriers exist. First, intercultural training materials are often abstract and not clearly applicable to hospitality contexts. Second, intercultural training can be quite costly, especially when it is customized to suit individual companies.\(^3\)

To help address these challenges, I developed an intercultural simulation that has a hospitality context and that educators and practitioners can use with minimal cost. This simulation provides the opportunity to anticipate and manage the clash of cultural values that affect business relationships. I initially used the simulation as part of an executive education course in intercultural communication offered by the Professional Development Program, School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University. Subsequently, the simulation has been used successfully with corporate executives, hospitality professionals, graduate students, and undergraduates from a wide variety of countries. The simulation has worked well with culturally homogeneous groups (e.g., all Japanese executives; all American undergraduates) and culturally heterogeneous groups (e.g., a group of 25 hospitality managers from eleven different countries; an MBA entering class containing one-third foreign students).

This tool, offered through Cornell’s Center for Hospitality Research, provides all the information a hospitality educator or practitioner needs to use the simulation. It can serve as a stand-alone, two-hour training program or be integrated into a longer training program or college course. The simulation is suitable for corporate-level professional development programs, executive education seminars, and college-level courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It can be adapted to suit a variety of situations, including property-level training and niche programs for those in the restaurant, cruise, resort, casino, or other segments of the hospitality industry.

The following discussion explains the hospitality scenario and participant roles, the educational objectives, the benefits, the options for adapting the simulation to specific circumstances, and the anticipated outcomes and takeaways. Attachments provide full instructions and guidelines for the simulation facilitator (Appendix A), the three culture-group leaders (Appendix B, Green, Red, Blue), all participants (Appendix C), and members of each culture group (Appendix D Green, Red, Blue). Instructions for follow-up activities are in Appendix E.

**The Hospitality Scenario of This Simulation**

In the simulation’s hospitality-oriented scenario, three companies, each from a different fictional culture, are planning a joint business venture: namely, to build a hotel and retail shopping complex. The three partners are a hotel company that will develop and manage the property, a construction firm that will build it, and a bank that will arrange the financing. During the simulation participants play the roles of managers representing their companies at a cocktail party that precedes a series of important business meetings to set up this partnership. Thus, both the business purpose and the social context of the simulation are hospitality centered. The concept of the cocktail party as a ritual is culturally based, not universal, so participants start with different assumptions about the event.

After becoming members of one of the three cultures, participants learn their specific cultural profile, including both surface traits (such as nonverbal style and greeting protocols) and deeper cultural traits (such as values, beliefs, and social structure). The cultures differ, for instance, in how the sexes are treated. One culture is male-dominated, one female-dominated, and one egalitarian. They also differ in terms of underlying beliefs about determinism, reason, and decision making. In preparation for the simulation, participants learn about their own cultures but receive no information about the others.

The three groups—referred to as the Red, Blue, and Green cultures—are intentionally fictitious to stress the need to be intuitive when interacting with people from an unfamiliar culture. At first glance, some participants may try to characterize the fictional cultures in familiar terms as Japanese, Australian, Arab, or even Californian. These generalizations do not hold up, however, and the participants cannot resort to stereotypes or known ways of dealing with actual cultures.

In the debriefing that follows the cocktail party, the group discusses the principles of intercultural communication and management that have been illustrated. Several options for follow up are possible. If time permits immediately after the debriefing, participants can replay the cocktail party using their expanded knowledge of and sensitivity to the

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values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the other cultures. Groups should meet separately for a brief time to discuss among themselves how to interact with others in the replay. A second option is to hold the meeting in which the three groups try to negotiate the business relationship and the particulars of the joint venture. This option does not have to be done immediately after the debriefing; in fact, waiting until a day or more will allow participants to reflect on what they’ve learned. The instructor will need to provide more details about the joint venture and the issues the participants must negotiate. A third follow-up option is to ask participants to move from the fictional to the real by applying their learning in their own work situations and then reporting back to the group at a later session.

**Educational Objectives of This Simulation**

The Cocktail Party Simulation has the following four main educational objectives:

1. To demonstrate in concrete terms the principles of intercultural communication, especially the relativity of cultural values and the inevitable emotional response to cultural differences;

2. To contrast the importance of underlying cultural differences in values, attitudes, and beliefs versus surface cultural differences, such as greeting rituals, manners, and customs. The “more elusive, subjective characteristics” are critical to management success, but are often overlooked;

3. To highlight the important question of who adapts to whom—and how—when cultural differences exist. Managers must be “true to their cultural values, preferred communication practices and expectations, while acknowledging and respecting the values, practices, and expectations of those different from them”, and

4. To show that cultural identity involves a complex mixture of elements, not merely nationality.

**Benefits That This Intercultural Simulation Provides**

The Cocktail Party Simulation offers several benefits. First, people involved in the hospitality industry find this simulation more interesting, engaging, and relevant than most intercultural training materials, which were developed for different constituencies, such as Peace Corps volunteers, refugee center managers, missionaries, and diplomatic personnel. The context of a cooperative business relationship does not exist in materials aimed at these types of audiences. For example, the classic simulation BaFá BaFá asks that participants first assume a role similar to that of an anthropologist doing ethnographic field work, observing a culture and learning about it, but with a great sense of distance. Observers must try to figure out social rules and learn a foreign language. Then participants try to live within this culture. Neither of these roles—objective observer or assimilated immigrant—involves the kind of human interactions required in business. In contrast, the Cocktail Party Simulation involves a hospitality context and business relationships.

Even those intercultural simulations that involve business relationships lack the hospitality focus and flexibility that would make them most meaningful to hospitality students and practitioners. The Randőmia simulation, for instance, features a manufacturing context and is intended especially for people from Western cultures who are preparing to work in non-Western cultures. The simulation entitled The Cost of Your Shirt concerns a maquiladora in Central America. Simulations created by Duke University’s

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4 Shay and Tracey, p. 35.


Center for International Business Education and Research focus on telecommunications, energy, high tech, and automotive industries, each set in one specific country, such as China or Chile.9

A second benefit of the Cocktail Party Simulation is that it makes the principles of intercultural communication concrete. Concreteness is important because people are generally unaware of many of their own deeply embedded cultural traits. Edward Hall, the anthropologist whose work catalyzed cross-cultural studies, wrote that “Culture hides much more than it reveals, and…it hides most effectively from its own participants.”10 It is one thing to know intellectually that cultures have different values; it is quite another to have enough self-insight to be able to work cooperatively with someone who has different values. Yet, much of what has been written on the subject is highly abstract and theoretical—difficult to make meaningful for practitioners.11 The Cocktail Party Simulation, however, situates the broad principles of intercultural communication in concrete contexts with which hospitality practitioners can identify.

A third benefit, especially important to business practitioners, is the simulation’s low cost. The substantial expense of customized intercultural training is a major deterrent to its use, according to several studies.12 The Cocktail Party Simulation, however, involves minimal costs other than the time of participants. Including the debriefing, the duration can be as short as two hours. Some organizations can save the expense of hiring a facilitator if an internal person is qualified to lead the debriefing discussion. No separate training support system is needed, and the program can be self-contained or linked to a larger training initiative. Direct costs include food and beverages, which need not be elaborate, and photocopies of instructions for participants (approximately three pages per participant).

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Modifications to Fit the Simulation to Specific Circumstances

The Cocktail Party Simulation is flexible enough to be easily adapted for groups of different sizes, levels of knowledge, and specific interests. It also can be modified to suit different physical spaces and budget constraints. It has been used successfully with small and large groups, from ten to 200 participants. No equipment is needed that constrains the number of participants. With larger groups (over 50), it is desirable to have two or more concurrent sessions. With 200 participants, for example, four groups of 50 worked concurrently, necessitating four leaders and four large rooms.

To adapt the simulation for different knowledge levels and interests of participants, the descriptions of the three cultures can be changed. The number of categories or number of descriptors in each category can be reduced or expanded. Details about the companies and cultures can be simplified or made more complex. For novice groups, such as undergraduate college students, the instructor can assign preliminary readings or hold pre-simulation discussions to enrich the experience.

The context can be changed to suit specialized audiences. For example, for an executive education group from the restaurant industry, the purpose of the venture might be to build a restaurant rather than a hotel-shopping complex, and a restaurant company could be substituted for the hotel company. For property-level training, the three groups

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9 See faculty.fuqua.duke.edu/ciber/site2006/programs/simulations.html.
What is positive in one culture may be negative in another—and those meanings are not always obvious.

might be hotel owners, executives from the management company, and union representatives of the employees; the purpose of the impending meeting might be to introduce a new service initiative or to negotiate some specific policy. To adapt the simulation to a functional group, such as marketing managers, the three groups might be redefined as executives from an advertising and public relations agency, government officials from a tourism ministry, and members of a corporate marketing team who are collaborating on a new promotional strategy.

Logistics can be simplified and costs lowered. For instance, the food category can be entirely eliminated in the culture descriptions. Although it is ideal to have breakout rooms in which the different companies can convene, if necessary they can meet in hallways or other public places so long as they cannot overhear one another.

Although the Cocktail Party Simulation can be used as a two-hour, stand-alone training program, it is even more valuable when integrated into an extended educational experience. In an executive education setting, it can be combined with sessions on such related topics as intercultural communication, cultural identity, and cultural intelligence. The simulation can serve as a kickoff event that introduces the program or as an experiential complement that allows active participant involvement. The simulation was initially developed as a half-day component of a five-day executive education course. Subsequently, it has been used as one or two classes in semester-long college courses, as a component of graduate-student orientation programs, as a part of diversity workshops, and as a half-day feature of executive seminars of various lengths.

Lessons and Action Plans That Participants Can Take Away from This Simulation

Hospitality trainers and educators seek to provide explicit lessons: memorable action items that participants or students can apply to their own lives. In the debriefing that follows the Cocktail Party Simulation, the facilitator can guide the discussion to several key principles about culture that create challenges for hospitality communication and leadership. In addition to explaining these principles, the facilitator can help participants envision concrete actions to take in order to meet those challenges.

In the following discussion, I outline five key principles of intercultural communication that the simulation illustrates, and I suggest specific action items that facilitators may elicit from participants in discussion. I draw examples from the simulation, as well as from incidents described in the opening of this report, to show how the challenges and action items play out in practice. These takeaways will help reinforce the participants’ learning.

**Principle 1: Cultural values are relative, not absolute.**

The challenge:

What is positive in one culture may be negative in another—and those meanings are not always obvious. For instance, the high value the Red culture members place on time causes them to act in ways that the other cultures perceive as rude. The Blue culture’s well-intentioned use of first names and physical touching offends the other cultures. The Green culture’s polite behavior of avoiding eye contact with strangers is often interpreted as shiftiness, insecurity, or impoliteness, and when the Green culture members huddle to make decisions by consensus, they are sometimes viewed as elitist, secretive, or unethical by the other cultures. In fact, there is nothing inherently positive or negative about time values, name customs, nonverbal behavior, or decision-making procedures.

**Actions to help meet the challenge:**

- Carefully observe others, including their words, actions, and nonverbal communication;
- Withhold judgment about these observations;
- Avoid making assumptions about others’ motives and intentions; and
- Verify your tentative interpretations of others’ words, actions, and nonverbal communication.

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For example, the resort manager in Hawaii who was mentioned at the start of this report could have observed guests’ nonverbal responses to Hawaiian customs, confirmed her interpretations by asking a knowledgeable informant, and then taught her staff to adjust the level of warm, personal, Aloha service to suit different clientele. What constitutes good service varies according to culture, and warm, personal service is not a universal preference.14

**Principle 2: People react emotionally, not just rationally to cultural differences.**

The challenge:

Intellectual knowledge about cultural differences does not insulate us from strong emotional responses to them. Emotional reactions are natural and inevitable. For instance, even if we know that a culture has a close conversation distance, it is hard not to back away when one's personal space is being invaded. Realizing that a particular culture encourages aggressive business persuasion does not make the “hard sell” any more comfortable for those whose practices are more low key.

**Actions to help meet the challenge:**

- Expect surprises, particularly, cultural and individual differences;
- Anticipate that you will react emotionally to some cultural differences; and
- To avoid offending or confusing others, practice not expressing your emotional responses openly or instantly.

The resort manager in Hawaii, for example, could have helped her staff realize that guests who preferred more dignified, less personal interaction did not mean to offend or to reject their well-intentioned hospitality.

Regarding the Chinese-Canadian business executive mentioned at the start of this report, he may have been blindsided because his confidence in his knowledge of Chinese language and customs led him not to expect the emotional upheaval of culture shock. If he had informed himself not just about the place and people but also about the psychological process of cross-cultural transitions, he would have expected the emotional responses and thus partially diffused them.15

**Principle 3: Visible cultural differences are easier to deal with than those that are hidden.**

The challenge:

Although overt cultural differences, such as greeting rituals and name customs, can be handled easily, the underlying, intangible differences are difficult to identify and overcome. In the Cocktail Party Simulation, the underlying cultural differences included assumptions about the purpose of the event, the nature of business relationships, the definition of hospitality, the role of power, and the structure of leadership. These types of beliefs, attitudes, and thought patterns had no visible manifestation; participants had to use intuition, imagination, and astute, tactful questioning to discover them. Meanwhile, however, the visible differences in customs, nonverbal behavior, and food preferences may have distracted participants or made them forget about the invisible cultural factors that would have a greater impact on business success.

**Actions to help meet the challenge:**

- Master the tangible differences so that you can concentrate on discerning the intangible ones during interactions;
- Listen between the lines; and
- Ask tactful questions to gain insights.

The Chinese-Canadian sent to head up expansion efforts in China could have recognized that the surface similarities he had with the Chinese were the tip of the

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Red culture’s food taboos and tried to accommodate them; others discovered the Green culture’s gender structure and tried to work within it. Meanwhile, though, to enhance social harmony, some Red culture members ate taboo food, and to achieve business goals, some Green culture members adapted to another culture’s gender structure. Confusion may result from such concurrent, contradictory attempts to adapt to each others’ cultural practices and preferences.

**Actions to help meet the challenge:**

- Carefully observe other people;
- Think creatively about how to adapt to others’ cultural preferences without sacrificing your own;
- Remain flexible about deferring to others’ practices sometimes; and
- Remember that your own culture is not inherently superior to that of others.

The Chinese-Canadian working in China, for instance, could have observed nonverbal behavior and looked for cues about what was important. Then he could have changed his behavior in the ways that seemed most important to the Chinese. For instance, he might have discovered that including local political party officials in business discussions was important to get action in China, even though it was unheard of in Canada. Expanding the business discussion circle would have been an easy adjustment for him to make without violating his own cultural values. Conversely, cultural iceberg. He could have listened more carefully to what others said, what they implied, and what they omitted saying. With these insights, he could have posed astute questions to discover the underlying beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that drove the Chinese to make business decisions and build professional relationships. Using his facility with the language, he could have gotten to the heart of the important cultural differences in thinking that matter the most.

In the case of the British, Kenyan, and Indian partners in a restaurant venture, their familiarity and compatibility with one another as college roommates made them fail to look deeper into their goals, motives, and business values. They could have asked each other the kinds of hard questions they would have asked potential business partners whom they did not know as friends. Active listening to one another could have led to a more objective understanding of each other’s beliefs, attitudes, values, ethics, and ways of thinking.16

**Principle 4: Flexibility is the key to figuring out who should adapt to whom—and how.**

**The challenge:**

It is hard to know when we should substitute other people’s cultural practices and preferences for our own. In the Cocktail Party Simulation, some participants discovered the
he might not have been willing to redefine health and safety standards to conform to Chinese practice.

**Principle 5: Cultural identity is multidimensional.**

**The challenge:**

We tend to equate culture with nationality, but that is just one of many dimensions. Each person has a distinctive mixture of cultural influences, including ethnicity, language, race, religion, gender, age, residence, profession, corporate affiliation, class, and other factors beyond nationality. Some of these factors change during people’s lives, such as when they move to a different place, learn a new language, convert to a different religion, or join a new company. Cultural backgrounds of people’s families, spouses, and significant others also affect their cultural identity.

**Actions to help meet the challenge:**

- Explore your own cultural identity and how it affects who you are, what you believe, how you behave, how you communicate, and why you do what you do;
- Search for commonalities, not just differences, between you and those from other cultures; and
- Capitalize on those commonalities.

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For instance, the Indian, Kenyan, and British business partners who wanted to start a restaurant chain might have sought common ground in their business education or family backgrounds. They might have drawn on ethical principles stressed in their management studies to devise socially responsible hiring and promotion practices. They might have capitalized on their common family loyalties to reach consensus on financial goals for their business venture.

The Chinese-Canadian business executive needed to explore his own cultural identity more fully to understand who he was—not just in terms of nationality and ethnicity, but also in terms of religion, gender, economic class, educational class, profession, age, and other factors. He might have found common ground with his Chinese colleagues more in terms of some of these factors than in terms of ethnicity and language. His adjustment might have been easier if he had taken a broader view of what constitutes cultural identity.

**Different Each Time**

Each use of the Cocktail Party Simulation has resulted in slightly different dynamics. Despite these differences, every group that has used this simulation has been enthusiastic and positive about the insights they have gained. This simulation has been successful in allowing people to learn with their feelings as well as with their intellects how to assess and manage intercultural communication challenges in the hospitality industry. The materials that follow provide the specifics of how to conduct this exercise, as well as some of the lessons that I have learned along the way.

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Note: Instructions and Appendices begin on the next page.
Appendix A

Instructions and Guidelines for the Simulation Facilitator

As facilitator, you will need to make preparations before the event, organize the participants during the event, lead the debriefing discussion, and conduct any follow-up activities. Here are suggestions and guidelines to help you.

What Advance Arrangements to Make

It is important to find an appropriate space where participants can mix easily and to organize the instructions, supplies, and refreshments.

Venue

The minimum space requirement is one room large enough for the entire group. This room should have enough space for people to circulate around a central table on which are placed refreshments. Although it is desirable to have three breakout rooms, the simulation actually needs only one room; groups can hold their separate company meetings almost anywhere—hallways, stairwells, even outdoors.

Printed Materials

- One copy of the instructions for each culture’s leader (Appendix B). Each receives his or her own, not the others.
- Copies of the general instructions, enough for all participants (Appendix C).
- Copies of the descriptions of each of the three cultures, preferably photocopied on the three different colors of paper (Appendix D). Each person receives his or her own culture description only.
- Optional: Copies of instructions for any follow-up activities (Appendix E.)

Supplies

- Equal numbers of large red, blue, and green nametags (construction paper works well);
- Markers or pens for writing names on nametags;
- Pins or plastic holders for nametags;
- Small paper plates and cocktail napkins;
- Plastic or paper cups; and
- Serving plates and knives.

Food

- Raw vegetables (e.g., carrots and celery);
- Fresh fruit (e.g., grapes);
- Cheese and crackers; and
- Chips or pretzels.

Beverages

- Whatever you prefer: mineral water, fruit juice, soft drinks, or wine.

How to Conduct the Simulation

1. Choose the vice presidents for each firm, and brief them in advance. Give them their instruction sheets (Appendix B). It is best to choose women as vice presidents of the Red and Blue cultures and a man for the Green. If you are familiar with the participants, take into account their leadership abilities and personalities in choosing the vice presidents. If it is not possible to choose the vice presidents in advance, then ask the culture groups to select their leader in their individual meetings.

2. Divide participants into three groups. If you are familiar with the participants, you may want to assign them to their groups. You can do this by preparing color-coded nametags in advance or by posting a list. With a large group, you can randomly assign groups by handing out colored nametags at the door as people enter. Ask participants to print their full names on the nametags, or have the nametags prepared in advance.

3. Introduce the event after distributing the one-page general handout (Appendix C). Do not give out the specific cultural description sheets at this point (Appendix D). The length of the introduction depends on whether your training method is inductive or deductive. If it is inductive, state briefly that the topic of intercultural communication in the hospitality industry is being introduced with this event, which will give participants an opportunity to experience the principles and ideas that will be discussed later. If you are using a deductive method, refer back to principles and ideas already covered and ask participants to think about how they apply to the event they are about to experience.

4. Explain the simulation’s logistics and the procedures, referring to the general handout (Appendix C). Answer any questions that arise.

5. Allow company groups to meet separately for 25 to 30 minutes. At this meeting, members should receive the one-page handout describing their own culture (Appendix D), but not handouts describing the other cultures. Ensure that the groups not only read their cultural descriptors, but also (a) practice greetings, conversation distance, and nonverbal behavior, (b) discuss how they will approach the cocktail party—what goals do they have, if any?, and (c) explore the details and ramifications of their culture’s beliefs, values, attitudes, and customs.

Visit each group to answer any questions and to make sure they are fully prepared. Have participants pair off and...
walk towards each other, stopping at their designated conversation distance.

Be sure the Green culture creates an imaginary religion that controls their lives. Have them identify their fictional higher power and create appropriate rituals. Encourage imaginative approaches. Also be sure they practice conversing with someone while not making eye contact, which is difficult for many people.

Members of the Blue culture often need some help in getting into the frame of mind of a culture that believes that fate and luck control most things. Ask them to think of how this belief will be manifested in a discussion of the joint-venture project at hand.

Members of the Red culture need to think about how they will feel and react when offered food that is a taboo in their culture. Ask them to imagine their revulsion if asked to eat something that is taboo in their real culture.

(6) When you are sure all groups are prepared, start the party. The Blue culture serves as host and should welcome others at the door. Plan for the party to last 30 to 40 minutes.

(7) Monitor the party interactions by walking around and observing, but do not intervene. With a large group, you may want to have a few additional observers. I have found that each simulation plays out in a slightly different fashion. Some groups attempt to adjust to each other to reach their own goals, but others are quickly stuck in the quagmire of their own cultural traits. Frequently one group gets frustrated and walks out. Sometimes the Red culture leaves in disgust when no one will take them seriously. Sometimes the Green culture’s bankers depart when no one understands them. If a group walks out, do not stop the party, for usually the group returns after conferring with one another.

(8) Use your judgment about when to call a halt to the party. If a critical incident is in progress at the 40-minute mark, for instance, do not interrupt the proceedings.

(9) Conduct a debriefing session during the next 50 or 60 minutes.

(10) Continue with any follow-up activities you choose. Some options are explained below, and instructions are in Appendix E.

How to Lead the Debriefing Discussion

Although there are many approaches by which the debriefing can be conducted, the following approach has worked well with a variety of groups. Typically, the participants are eager to share comments, and it is therefore desirable for the facilitator to hold back his or her comments and observations until the participants can release their pent-up energy.

(1) Discuss each culture from the outsider and insider points of view. Ask members of the Blue and Green cultures to say how they feel about members of the Red culture. Have them describe the Red culture’s behavior; interpret it in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes; and explain how they felt towards these people. Members of the Red culture must keep quiet and concentrate on understanding what others thought about them and why. To summarize, you might go around the room and have each member of the Blue and Green cultures give one adjective that describes the Red culture. Inevitably, some of the interpretations will be correct, but others will be serious misunderstandings. Behavior that was intended to be positive will be interpreted in a negative way.

Next, allow the Red culture members to respond by explaining their culture to the others and by highlighting the misunderstandings that occurred. Ask how the group felt about its own culture.

Continue in the same systematic fashion by focusing in turn on the Blue and Green cultures. Negative qualities that are in fact unfair will be attributed to each group, including rudeness, stupidity, and weirdness. Each group will legitimately feel that it was misunderstood, underappreciated, and not viewed empathetically. Resentments and feelings of martyrdom will emerge. Usually each group defends the rightness of its culture vigorously, and this is a good illustration of how ethnocentrism and strong group affiliation can quickly develop.

(2) Ask for examples of how people adjusted to the cultural differences as they discovered them. For instance, often one culture accepts and even reciprocates another’s greeting ritual. Sometimes a female vice president decides to send a male envoy to interact with the male-dominated Green culture. Sometimes after members of the Blue culture discover the Red culture’s raw food taboo, they make a point of politely offering them cooked foods—in this case, crackers and chips. This part of the discussion is a critical issue for intercultural communication in business: who adjusts to whom? When and how do they do so?

(3) Discuss any critical incidents that occurred during the party. For example, as I indicated above, one group may have become so offended that it walked out en
Cultural values are relative, not absolute;
People react emotionally, not just rationally, to cultural differences;
Visible cultural differences are easier to deal with than those that are hidden;
Flexibility is the key to figuring out who should adapt to whom—and how; and
Cultural identity is multidimensional.

Connect these principles to the specific intercultural challenges participants face in their work lives. Ask them to share their experiences interacting with coworkers, guests, clients, colleagues, property owners, or business partners with different cultural backgrounds. Were any of these experiences analogous to those illustrated in the Cocktail Party Simulation? How could they apply new insights to past experiences? What could they do to avoid intercultural conflict or misunderstandings in the future? Help participants apply the lessons of the simulation to their everyday situations.

How to Follow Up on the Cocktail Party

If time permits, you may want to include any of these follow-up activities as a way to reinforce what participants have learned and to help them apply this learning:

(1) Replay the cocktail party now that participants have greater knowledge about and insight into the psychology of the other cultures.
(2) Hold a simulated business meeting in which the participants discuss the possible joint venture and try to reach agreement about it.
(3) Ask participants to record for the next few weeks specific ways in which the principles emphasized in the simulation come into play in their work lives. Then reconvene the group in about a month to discuss these real-life experiences.
Appendix B

Distribute each set of instructions to the relevant leader only, not to all three.

Blue Group Leader
Specific Instructions for the Leader of the Blue Culture Group (Vice President of the Hotel Company)
You have about 25 minutes to help the members of your company learn your imaginary culture, discuss how you will act at the cocktail party, and become comfortable with your roles.
(1) Distribute the culture description handout to members of your company. Read the description aloud to the group and clarify it if necessary. Answer any questions.
(2) Lead the group in discussing the details and ramifications of your culture's beliefs, values, attitudes, and customs. What are the implications of each element? Your discussion should go into some depth. Be sure to spend some time getting into the frame of mind of a culture that believes that fate and luck control most things. How will this belief be manifested in a discussion of the business project at hand?
(3) Lead the group in discussing how your group will approach the cocktail party. What goals do you have, if any? Remember that you are hosting the cocktail party and should welcome your guests at the door (but not overwhelm or offend them).
(4) Have the group practice your culture's greetings, protocols, conversation distance, and nonverbal behavior. Pair off to do this.
(5) At the appointed time the party is to start, be ready to welcome your guests. You are hosting this event. The party will last about 30 to 40 minutes.

Red Group Leader
Specific Instructions for the Leader of the Red Culture Group (Vice President of the Construction Company)
You have about 25 minutes to help the members of your company learn your imaginary culture, discuss how you will act at the cocktail party, and become comfortable with your roles.
(1) Distribute the culture description handout to members of your company. Read the description aloud to the group and clarify it if necessary. Answer any questions.
(2) Lead the group in discussing the details and ramifications of your culture's beliefs, values, attitudes, and customs. What are the implications of each element? Your discussion should go into some depth. Be sure to imagine how will you feel and react when offered food that is a taboo in your culture. Imagine your revulsion if asked to eat something that is taboo in your real culture.
(3) Lead the group in discussing how your group will approach the cocktail party. What goals do you have, if any?
(4) Have the group practice your culture's greetings, protocols, conversation distance, and nonverbal behavior. Pair off to do this.
(5) Go to the party venue at the appointed time. The party will last about 30 to 40 minutes.

Green Group Leader
Specific Instructions for the Leader of the Green Culture Group (Vice President of the Bank)
You have about 25 minutes to help the members of your company learn your imaginary culture, discuss how you will act at the cocktail party, and become comfortable with your roles.
(1) Distribute the culture description handout to members of your company. Read the description aloud to the group and clarify it if necessary. Answer any questions.
(2) Lead the group in discussing the details and ramifications of your culture's beliefs, values, attitudes, and customs. What are the implications of each element? Your discussion should go into some depth. Be sure to create an imaginary religion that controls your lives. Identify your fictional "higher power" and create appropriate rituals. Be imaginative!
(3) Lead the group in discussing how your group will approach the cocktail party. What goals do you have, if any?
(4) Have the group practice your culture's greetings, protocols, and nonverbal behavior. Pair off to do this.
(5) Be sure to practice conversing with someone while not making eye contact, which is difficult for many people to do. Try focusing your eyes on their hair, their ears, or their necks!
(6) Go to the party venue at the appointed time. The party will last about 30 to 40 minutes.
Appendix C

General Instructions for All Participants

The Cocktail Party Intercultural Simulation

To be distributed at the beginning of the simulation.

Three companies are planning a joint venture to build a new hotel and retail shopping complex. The hotel company will develop and manage the property, the construction company will build it, and the bank will arrange the financing. The companies come from three different fictional cultures: Blue, Red, and Green. Each has specific cultural values, traits, customs, and practices.

You are a manager in the company to which you have been assigned. You will attend a cocktail party that opens a series of important business meetings during which the companies will negotiate the details of the partnership. Your management team includes a vice president and a number of other managers.

(1) In your company’s assigned room, meet with the vice president and managers from your company to discuss what your objectives and approaches will be at the cocktail party. Using the description of your assigned culture that you will receive, practice how you will talk and behave until you are reasonably familiar with your cultural orientation. Be sure to practice conversation distance, greeting rituals, and nonverbal behavior.

(2) At the appointed time, come to the cocktail party venue. As the cocktail party proceeds, interact with the managers from the other companies. Maintain the role you have been assigned, but do not discuss it explicitly. Notice how other people react to you, and how you react to them.

(3) Be ready to discuss your experiences after the cocktail party ends.

Tentative time guidelines:

Introduction and general instructions, 10 minutes
Company meeting, 20-30 minutes
Cocktail party, 30-40 minutes
Debriefing discussion, 50-60 minutes

Room assignments

Cocktail Party Venue: _______
Blue Culture Company Private Meeting: _______
Red Culture Company Private Meeting: _______
Green Culture Company Private Meeting: _______
Appendix D

Distribute each set of instructions to the relevant group only, not to all three.

### Blue Culture

**Specific Instructions for Members of the Blue Culture**

To be distributed and discussed at the company meeting of the Blue Culture.

**Hotel Company**

**Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes that Underlie Your Culture’s Communication**

You believe that fate and luck control most things. You believe in feelings more than reasoning.

In your culture, an authoritarian leader makes the ultimate decisions.

**Nonverbal Traits of Your Culture**

You treat time as something that is not important. It is not a commodity that can be lost.

Your conversation distance is close (about 20 inches, face-to-face), and you touch others on the arm occasionally when in conversation.

**Verbal Traits of Your Culture**

You frequently express gratitude and other emotions to others.

You interrupt others who are speaking and are not offended if they interrupt you.

**Business Customs in Your Culture**

You treat women as superior to men.

You avoid conflict.

**Greetings and Courtesies**

When meeting someone or leaving them, you hug warmly but gently.

Your most common greeting phrase is “Howdy, pal!”

You call everyone by their first names, and you refer directly to people by name frequently in conversation (e.g., “As I was telling you, George, we want to . . .”).

**Food**

You eat and drink with gusto. In your culture, eating and drinking are considered some of the greatest pleasures in life.

### Red Culture

**Specific Instructions for Members of the Red Culture**

To be distributed and discussed at the company meeting of the Red Culture.

**Construction Company**

**Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes that Underlie Your Culture’s Communication**

You believe that people determine their own destinies. You prefer to make decisions in a democratic manner. You believe in reason over feelings.

**Nonverbal Traits of Your Culture**

Your conversation distance is far (about 40 inches, face-to-face), and staring is not considered impolite.

You believe that time is a valuable commodity, and you don’t want to waste any.

**Verbal Traits of Your Culture**

You are direct in expressing your ideas and opinions.

You ask lots of questions.

You don’t express thanks to others because in your view, people choose their actions to create their own destinies; in other words, if someone does something for you, he or she is also doing it for himself or herself.

**Business Customs in Your Culture**

You welcome conflict as a way of reaching a better decision. You treat women and men as equals.

**Greetings and Courtesies**

When meeting someone or leaving them, you shake hands firmly.

Your most common greeting phrase is “good morning,” “good afternoon,” or “good evening.”

You call people, except for children, by their complimentary title (Mr., Ms.) plus their family names.

**Food**

You don’t eat raw vegetables or fruit. In your culture, it is considered uncivilized and uncouth to do so. Raw food is taboo.
Appendix D (concluded)

Green Culture

Specific Instructions for Members of the Green Culture
To be distributed and discussed at the company meeting of the Green Culture.

Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes that Underlie Your Culture’s Communication
Members of your culture are strongly religious and believe that a higher power directly and frequently intervenes in human affairs.
Your culture makes decisions by consensus of the group and only after thorough discussion.

Nonverbal Traits of Your Culture
You avoid eye contact with strangers in order to show respect.
Your conversation distance is medium (about 30 inches, face-to-face).

Verbal Traits of Your Culture
You never contradict others directly in conversation. Silence is considered a positive and affirmative signal.

Business Customs in Your Culture
You treat men as superior to women.
In business settings, men and women often segregate themselves.

Greetings and Courtesies
You call people by the courtesy title “Brother” or “Sister,” followed by their first names.
Your most common greeting phrase is “Peace.”
You bow slightly when greeting someone.

Food
In your culture, people are very conscious of cleanliness, so you always tuck a napkin in your collar before eating or drinking anything.

Appendix E

Instructions for Optional Follow-Up Activities

Option 1: Replaying the Cocktail Party
After having gained insight into the other cultures, you are in a better position to build relationships with them. To do so you will replay the cocktail party from the beginning.
Meet with your company group privately again to consider what is the best approach to take at the party. Capitalize on your new insights into the other cultures but at the same time be true to your own most important cultural values and practices.

Option 2: Holding the Business Meeting
After having gained insight into the other cultures, you are in a better position to build relationships with them. To do so you will attend the business meeting at which the three companies negotiate the details of their relationship and their responsibilities within the joint venture. Meet with your company group privately again to plan how you will conduct yourself at tomorrow’s meeting. What are your goals, approaches, and strategies? What persuasive approaches will be most effective with your partners? How can you interact with them to maximize the chance that all three companies benefit from the joint venture? Come to the meeting prepared to capitalize on your new insights into the other cultures but at the same time to be true to your own most important cultural values and practices.

Option 3: Applying the Principles to Your Own Work Life
After returning to your work environment, apply the principles that the Cocktail Party Simulation highlighted. For the next month, make notes about specific examples of situations, people, opportunities, and decisions that involved cultural differences. What action steps did you take to meet the challenges that arose? What were the outcomes? What might you do differently in the future, and why? We will reconvene in a month to share the results and your observations.
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