

Our mixed cultures

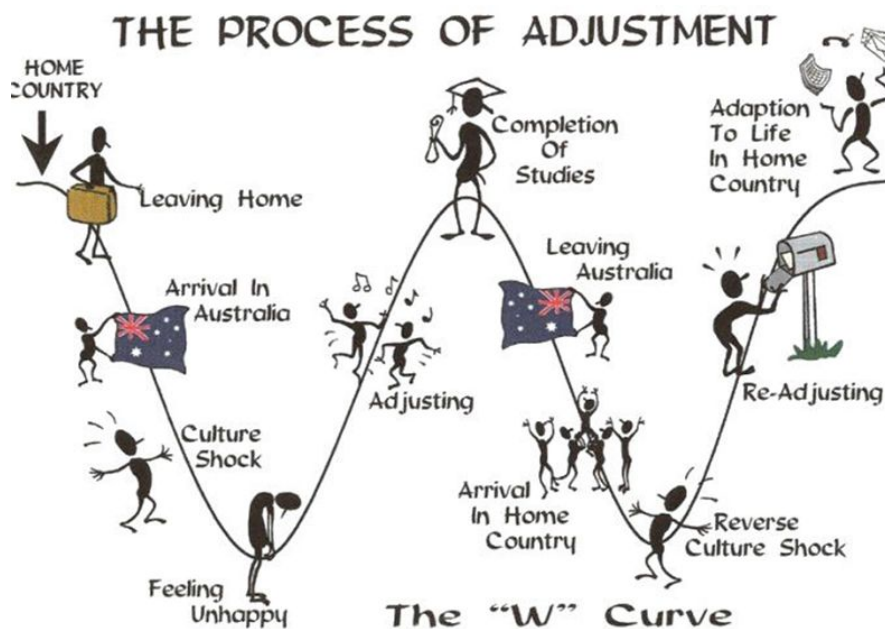
According to Professor Geert Hofstede, culture is "The collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another". It's a manifestation and lifestyle of particular people.

Our group consists of mixed cultures, which is something I never experienced in my earlier projects. It includes two origin nationalities, Avans and Fontys students, separate work fields of expertise and different intentions for attending this minor. Even when we didn't share many similarities, we still collaborated as students who are eager to pass all courses.

The barriers

Right before we begin working on the project, I stumbled across a communication barrier when we started working together. I was planning on making a Plan of Action, while others were suggesting to make a Debriefing. Since neither of us were aware of each other's table of content, we discussed what kind of document we would write. It turns out everyone uses different names for a document that summarizes the problem description and project goals. The different approaches practised within our team didn't streamline the process very well because of the unawareness of each other's way of working.

I feel like attending this minor gave me a culture shock, as stated below. The home country is my field of working (which is programming), Australia is the DXD-minor and the end of the road will be my internship.



It sounds more familiar to my problem than I thought, because "The process of adjusting when you move from a familiar, predictable environment to living in a country where everything is new. Knowing what to expect and recognising the symptoms, will help you manage culture shock." (Lecture Intercultural Communications at Avans).

I was unprepared for having a 'Culture Shock'- and 'Feeling Unhappy'-phase. My group members were unprepared for it as well because they were having struggles with understanding me. I identified this as another issue while I've noticed as well. However, I feel

like I'm reaching the top of the first part of the curve now the minor is reaching its end date. When I'm attending my internship, I'm sure I'll experience the last part of the curve as well.

The achievements

I am highly satisfied with the outcomes of all our group exercises. We shared many insights when we watched the TED-Talks, had lots of laughs at the Berlin-trip and worked all hands on deck at the design challenge. I'd say we eventually overcame the communication barrier altogether. I feel adjusted when I say that this group did a pretty good job!

My recommendations

There are five approaches to work with other cultures:

- 1. Cultural avoidance** You avoid confrontation and don't impose your own culture in order to be professional
- 2. Cultural dominance** You do what comes naturally from your own background and assume that others will adapt
- 3. Cultural accommodation** You make a huge effort in adapting to locals
- 4. Cultural compromise** You do half of what comes naturally and give up half
- 5. Cultural synergy** You develop new ways of working

At the first period of the minor, I tried to compromise because I wanted to learn from others and let others learn from me. Unfortunately, it turned out that they weren't interested in using my methods. At the end, I'm accommodating to understand their culture, but I still maintain my own.

My recommendation for working in intercultural teams, try to reach a true cultural synergy. It is essential for the collaboration of the group and can even improve the final result. Nevertheless, all cultures have different ideas and can supplement each other.