



4.5 | Analyze: Compare Cultural & Organizational Values

Researchers who study culture have created a variety of taxonomies to categorize societies, many of which are values-based. For example, Geert Hofstede's (1986) Cultural Dimensions Theory categorizes cultures on the basis of five cultural value dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long Term Orientation (see the recommended readings and weblinks for more details on these dimensions).

An educator seeking to develop instruction for an unfamiliar society or organization should consider how each of these dimensions might influence the instructional design. For example, consider how people in different societies value **individualism** versus being a part of a group or organization (referred to as **collectivism**). This culturally-determined value can impact the prevalence and acceptability of different learning designs, such as experiences designed to foster a community of practice (CoP) (Bransford, et al, 1999). Communities of practice could be expected to thrive in collectivist cultures that value collaboration over competitiveness. Some common generalizations for Individualistic and Collectivist cultures are listed below.

In a **Highly Individualistic** culture, the following tendencies are very strong:

- Individual achievement is the basis for social standing.
- There are laws protecting the rights of the individual.
- People are expected to act on their own behalf.
- It is acceptable for individuals to have unpopular opinions.
- Individualized decision-making is preferred over consensus decision-making.
- Social philosophies focus on universal principles not on social particulars.
- Loyalty to an organization is not expected; pay for performance is expected.
- People seek variety and interest in work.

In a **Highly Collectivist** culture, the following tendencies are very strong:

- Attributes such as birth, ethnicity, and gender are the basis for social standing.
- Laws protect group and community interests.
- People are expected to defer to the interests of the group.
- Individuals cannot express unpopular opinions without risk of disapproval.
- Consensus decision-making is preferred; sharing one's individual opinion is risky.
- Social philosophies focus on privileges and prerogatives, not on universal principles.
- Loyalty to an organization is expected; performance is secondary.

You may find that the things you value are very different from the values of the culture for which you are designing instruction. Determining the alignment of your own values with those of the learner and stakeholders is important because a mismatch of values can compromise the success of the instruction. You must *interact* with your stakeholders and target learners to determine their values, use *introspection* to identify your own values and how they differ from your audience's values, and design with *intentionality* to ensure that your design is compatible with the culture for which you are designing (Thomas, Mitchell & Joseph, 2002).

The various career environments embody different purposes and values that impact instructional designs, as well. This is especially problematic when two organizations with different purposes and/or values collaborate on an instructional design project (e.g., business and university partnerships). The differences between the organizations are further exacerbated by the faulty stereotypes that each often



harbors about the other. Note the differences between career environments illustrated in the comparison chart below:

	Government	Business & Industry	Higher Education	Military
Purpose & Goals	Derives power from the people; instituted to protect the rights of the people; intended to secure the “unalienable rights” of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. <i>(Each government has unique purposes and goals; those listed here are for the U.S.A.)</i>	To generate profit for private gain, usually in competition with other companies. To increase productivity and maximize the financial position of organizations.	To generate knowledge through collaboration between scholars, not competition, and in such a way that society as a whole benefits. To educate learners and expand the boundaries of knowledge through disciplined inquiry.	To protect, defend, and preserve the country.
Contextual Features	Pervasive influence of politics. Frequent change in political leadership and policy direction. Absence of well-defined measures of success. Democratic accountability. Rules of procedures.	Definite and precise deadlines. Customer orientation.	Resistance to change. Authority is diffused to individual faculty members and committees for decisions. Highly traditional. Student orientation.	When not at war, in training. Strong hierarchical structure.
Basic Values <i>(these are values claimed by organizations that may or may not be observable)</i>	Public service. Security. Respect for the law and democratic institutions. Political neutrality and provision of impartial advice. Integrity and pride in work. Fair, honest, and impartial treatment of people. Public accountability and probity. Commitment to the principles of equity and merit. Ethical behavior. Workplace free from harassment.	Capitalism. Pragmatism. Efficiency; time is money. Transferable intellectual and social skills. Outcomes-based culture. Pursuit of profit.	Intellectual freedom of scholars and the institution. Academic rigor. Disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Intellectual integrity and freedom of expression in teaching and research. Take the time to do it right. Inquiry-oriented culture. University and community service. Pursuit of truth.	Duty, honor, country. Discipline and integrity. Competence, physical courage, moral courage, teamwork, confidence, trust, delegation, cooperation.
Stereotypes Others Harbor About Them	Mired in bureaucratic red tape. Questionable talent because after an initial trial period, employment laws make it difficult to remove a government worker who is not being productive.	Pragmatic but not creative. Only interested in the “bottom line” (profits). Work tends to be boring with no opportunity for creativity.	Too theoretical and don’t have any practical experience. Researchers are not “do-ers.” Can’t meet deadlines. Don’t know how to communicate in plain English.	Blood-thirsty warmongers. Low intellectual abilities in the lower ranks. Rigid and trapped in accepted procedures.

Compiled from Clark, 2001; Davidson-Shivers, 2002; Durzo, 1981; Knowles, 1977; Levenson, 2000; Rovai, Ponton & Baker, 2008; Stolovitch, 1981; Tasker & Packham, 1993.

Use the following list of values to help you identify your own values and determine those of the stakeholders and target learners for which you are designing instruction. After identifying your own



values, those of the key stakeholders, and those of the target learners, analyze the differences and determine how they might impact your design. Consider, too, how members of another culture or organization might rank these values.

Instructions:

Rank the following life values according to their importance to you, with “1” representing the most important and “12” representing the least important value.

- ___ **Personal Gratification** (seeking to gratify personal goals and desires).
- ___ **Honor** (showing respect to elders, parents, and authority figures).
- ___ **Creativity** (producing unique work and using one’s imagination).
- ___ **Variety** (living a varied life filled with challenge, novelty and change).
- ___ **National Security** (living in a safe environment).
- ___ **Stability and Order** (living a stable, orderly and predictable life).
- ___ **Change and Opportunity** (living a life of change, opportunity, adventure and risk).
- ___ **Self-discipline** (being disciplined and in control of personal impulses and actions).
- ___ **Freedom** (the ability to think and act according to personal values and beliefs).
- ___ **Politeness** (using good manners and being courteous to others).
- ___ **Independence** (self-reliant and free to choose one’s own goals and future role in society).
- ___ **Responsibility** (fulfilling one’s duties and meeting obligations).
- ___ **Teamwork** (working in collaboration and cooperation with others to accomplish goals).

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