

Utilizing *Understanding Global Cultures* in a Strategic Management Course

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I have incorporated Martin Gannon's book, *Understanding Global Cultures*, into my upper level graduate class "Seminar in International Strategic Management" for several semesters. The course objective is to analyze, formulate and implement business strategies in an international context by addressing the particular issues, problems and opportunities found in various cultures. Gannon's book has been instructive in clearly addressing concepts, theories and analytical tools that can be used to understand the complexities of specific cultures.

As part of the class, groups of between four and six students work together on assignments during the semester. One group assignment is an oral presentation based on one of the more than 25 cultural metaphors described in *Understanding Global Cultures*. The first chapter of the book introduces the concept of cultural metaphors and provides a four-stage model of cultural understanding, which the student groups use in preparation for the cultural metaphor presentation to the class. Groups are allowed to select the country for the metaphor presentation from the options in the book via a bidding process. I often narrow the range of country metaphor choices for the sake of expediency. Since San Diego State is located on the Pacific Rim, my choices always include China, Japan, and Mexico. However, I also select areas that may be less familiar to the students, such as Portugal and Turkey. As globalization as well as the diversity of our student body is increasing, exposure to more cultures provides a valuable experience.

Based on the selected cultural metaphor presentation, student groups are assigned two specific business case analyses which were chosen to challenge the students to integrate and apply the knowledge learned from the book's cultural metaphors. For the cultural metaphor presentation, outside research is required in addition to the material contained in *Understanding Global Cultures*.

The fourth group activity is to develop a strategic plan for an actual company to enter a new international market. Successful completion of this assignment requires not only understanding global cultures but also integrating managerial and strategic analysis lessons from previous business courses into a global arena. This assignment is designed to reinforce the concepts of formulating and implementing business strategies with the additional international element.

Early in the class, students are introduced to the concept of national culture in a lecture format, with an emphasis on Hofstede's national culture dimensions. Class activities also challenge the students to reflect on the emotional impact of culture. In an "Embassy Reception" exercise, the class is randomly divided into the Alpha tribe and the Beta Corporation. Each group is given a description of its culture (see exhibits A and B).

The two groups meet at an embassy reception. The reception includes soft drinks to help create the social atmosphere. The groups interact for approximately 30 minutes. At the end, there is a debriefing and the students discuss their reactions to the other group.

International students have both agreed and disagreed with the cultural metaphors in *Understanding Global Cultures*. Students often comment that the metaphors well represent their country's culture. However, in other cases, students have disagreed with their country's metaphor. Occasionally, it appears some students have trouble seeing themselves as others may see them. Also, some students may have experienced a different culture in their own country. For example, Mexico has at least five sub-cultures. Another reaction can be a clash of cultures when students from historically opposed countries discuss cultural metaphor in a very lively manner.

Students often start the "Seminar in International Strategic Management" in a rather tentative manner. Later, as groups grow more confident, students become more creative in presenting outside research into a country's national culture. Typically, students will start with a presentation of a country's general environment and cultural dimensions. They often present the metaphor from *Understanding Global Cultures* with a video. Students then explain the importance of the various aspects of the culture that was portrayed in the video. As students become more involved in the course, they may research and present the business etiquette of the country, which is not explicitly covered in the book. Students often bring slides, food, and beverages as a colorful way to present the flavor of the national cultural presentation.

Generally, students start with a very ethnocentric perspective. Students from the United States often attempt to apply U.S. solutions in international settings in ways that would have disastrous consequences. International students also begin with a strong tendency to enact their own cultural norms. For example, a Chinese student came to me regarding a problem with her group. The norm in China is not to confront someone directly, but rather talk to a third person. The third person would convey the message to the other party. The U.S. students chided the Chinese student for involving the professor. As it turned out, this was used as a learning experience for everyone.

By the end of the semester, students have seen a wide range of types of cultures and are ready to develop specific actions to deal with national cultural challenges in their implementation strategies. Presenting and utilizing the cultural metaphors provides a richness that the cultural dimensions alone would not allow and results in enhanced student learning and understanding.

Multi-Culture Exercise

Exhibit A

The Alpha Culture

The Alpha tribe is warm and supportive. Fishing and water sports are important. The society is patriarchal. Females are protected. The leader should be the oldest male. The society exhibits the following cultural dimensions.

Power Distance	High
Uncertainty Avoidance	High
Masculinity	Low
Collectivism	High
Long-term Orientation	High

Practice the Alpha culture in your Tribe.

Select a leader.

Prepare to meet the Beta Tribe at an Embassy reception.

Exhibit B

The Beta Culture

The Beta tribe is made up of mercantilistic traders. It is important to succeed in business. The society is a meritocracy. There is no gender discrimination. The society exhibits the following cultural dimensions.

Power Distance	Low
Uncertainty Avoidance	Low
Masculinity	High
Individualism	High
Long-term Orientation	Low

Practice the Beta culture in your Tribe.

Select a leader.

Prepare to meet the Alpha Tribe at an Embassy reception.