EXPLORE AFRICAN CULTURES

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OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the case for an African culture and 6 shared cultural values found across Africa

2. Learn methods to adapt and flex your style for success in Africa

3. A brief on African culture & Q/A
THE AFRICAN CONTINENT
Can One Really Talk About an African Culture?

- Size
- Linguistic/cultural diversity & Barriers
- Conflicts
- Political differences
- Racial Difference; etc.
Africa’s Linguistic Diversity

African Languages

Language Families
Afro-Asatic
Nilo-Saharan
Khoisan
Niger-Congo / Congo-Kordofanian
Coclade
Austronesian
Indo-European
THE Real Size of Africa
Is there an American; European ... or a Russian culture?
Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) is the father of Négritude, the African essence is externalized in a distinctive culture and philosophy. This claim is supported by Senghor’s assertion that Negritude – the rooting of identity in one’s natural essence – is ‘diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe’ (the colonizer). To Senghor, European philosophy is essentially static and objective. It is founded on separation and opposition: on analysis and conflict. In contrast, African philosophy is based on ‘unity’, ‘balance’ negotiation and an appreciation of ‘movement and rhythm.

John Mbiti (1931-2019). Mbiti's seminal book, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), was the first work to challenge Christian assumption that traditional African religious ideas were "demonic and anti-Christian". His sympathetic treatment of traditional religions was based on massive field work. Mbiti was clear that his interpretation of these religions was from a firmly Christian perspective, and this aspect of his work was sometimes severely criticized. Mbiti's research interests included theology in Africa and Asia, and *ecumenism*. He also collaborated on a book of African *proverbs*, collected from across the continent. Mbiti (1969) observed "wherever the African is there is his religion; he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony"
Lilyan Kesteloot (1931-2018). Kesteloot was a pioneer in her own right. Her contributions were on the black African literature but most importantly on communication style, which I will come back to in a moment. At a time where people were questioning the existence of an African culture she spent a lot of time, intellectual capital in writing about African literature – including oral literature and style as propagated by the griots.

SHARED CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

Omnipresence of religion

Supremacy of the community

Respect for authority and age
SHARED AFRICAN VALUES
Can One Really Talk About an African Culture?

- Cultural Values must be described along a continuum that is affected by factors such as modern education; rural versus urban divide; personal traits and preferences, etc.

- Focus must be on commonalities versus differences

- Prior work on intercultural communication constructs can be used to articulate these common values and behaviors
SHARED AFRICAN VALUES

- Term Orientation: Short-term, Long-term
- Time: Polychronic, Monochronic
- Power Distance: Hierarchical, Egalitarian
- Communication: High Context, Low Context
- Group Orientation: Collectivistic, Individualistic
- Uncertainty Avoidance: Low, High
This dimension refers to the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.

In collectivist mindset cultures, people are integrated from birth into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which play a role in their upbringing thus also creating a strong sense of loyalty to these groups.

By contrasts, in individualistic societies, the emphasis is put on personal achievements and individual rights. People are expected to stand up for themselves and their immediate family, and to choose their own affiliations. In individualistic cultures, one is responsible for one’s own success, and individuals are not accountable to group norms or expectations.
Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

Societies with a high power distance typically accept and value varying levels of “inequality” and this is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Such societies tend to be more hierarchical and often have layers of ascribed powers and people in certain roles – clergy, religious elders, and politicians yield a great deal of power. Power distance affects non-verbal behaviors such as those between subordinates and superiors and interclass interactions.

Cultures that endorse low power distance expect and accept power relations that are more equal. Low power distance cultures thrive on informality and acquired power is sought after.
In high context communication cultures, there is greater reliance on contextual cues such as age, status, and non-verbals that give meaning to messages. Less verbal people are often perceived as more culturally acceptable and desirable in high context cultures.

By contrast, low context communication cultures utilize detailed, factual information to explicitly convey meaning. In low context communication, information has only one single meaning. No additional information is necessary to encode the meaning. Low context cultures are said to value facts and directness. Communicators are expected to be straightforward, concise in telling what action is expected.
The cultural concept of time has been framed as either monochronic or polychronic by Edward T. Hall.

In polychronic cultures, people tend to handle multiple things concurrently (or intermittently during a time period) and to emphasize the number of completed transactions. Being on time is less important in polychronic cultures than in monochronic cultures. In Polychronic time cultures, meetings may start late, run overtime, and allow outside issues to interrupt team meetings.

Monochronic time cultures emphasize schedules, a precise reckoning of time, and promptness. Time is viewed as a discrete commodity.
This describes the extent to which a society shows tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It reflects the extent to which members of a society attempt to cope with anxiety by minimizing uncertainty.

In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, people accept and feel comfortable in unstructured situations or volatile environments. They try to have as few rules as possible. People in these cultures tend to be more pragmatic and tolerant of change.

People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to minimize the occurrence of the unknown and unusual circumstances with careful planning and by implementing rules, laws and regulations.
Term orientation refers to a societies’ time horizon.

Cultures associated with short-term orientation have shown to respect traditions, fulfilling of social obligations, and protection of one's 'face'. These societies reward perseverance, loyalty, and commitment, and avoid doing anything that would cause another to "lose face".

By contrast, long-term oriented societies attach more importance to the future and are willing to delay short-term gains for future goals.
From an incredible cultural diversity, a case can be made for shared African cultural values and a shared African world view.

Understanding these behaviors is a window into African cultural tendencies, which can facilitate and enhance communication and interactions with Africans in a variety of social, professional and business settings.
Q&A WITH GEREMIE SAWADOGO
1. Look for an email from CultureWizard with a link to access the African Cultures Course.
2. At a minimum, complete the African Cultures Calculator assessment to learn where there are gaps or similarities with the shared African cultural values.
3. Access any of the African Country Profiles to research the cultural norms and other details that are key to adapting in culturally appropriate ways.

Email webinars@rw-3.com for help accessing CultureWizard