

**BS2301 Culture and International Business**

**Portfolio**

**Part I**

**Individual Assignment**

***“Intercultural Awareness – My Experience in Morocco”***

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## **Introduction**

Culture is learned through members of their society, we start to learn it from a very young age. It includes morals, values and beliefs. These are acquired through group norms.

I experienced Moroccan culture and the culture of Islam when I went to Morocco for a month. I was initially incredibly uncomfortable with how Moroccan people live. Culture shock is a process that occurs within a person, who finds themselves in a foreign country where everything seems unfamiliar. It has many symptoms, which Oberg stated such as sadness and isolation. Although I attempted to reduce culture shock by researching Morocco before I arrived, I still found it completely unfamiliar. Culture shock was a daunting process for me to go through. It was the first time I had truly felt it as Moroccan culture was so contrasting to European culture. Oberg (1960) developed a concept relating to culture shock, stating that culture shock was in four stages: the honeymoon stage, the irritation and hostility stage, the gradual adjustment stage and the biculturalism stage. I experienced all of the four stages during my one month stay in Marrakesh, Morocco last year.

## **Intercultural Awareness**

## My Experience in Morocco

I have had many intercultural counters where I have come face-to-face with the clear differences between English Culture and Islam. The most significant was when I experienced Moroccan culture, whose main religion is also Muslim, where I significantly felt a huge amount of Culture Shock, as their culture was so unfamiliar. Culture Shock is "anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse." (Ferraro, 2006, p.151.) Culture shock was first developed by Kalvero Oberg (1960). I felt a large amount of "psychological disorientation" (Mead & Andrews, 2009, p.371.)

I went on a one month long holiday in July 2010 to a city called Marrakesh in Morocco. A majority of its population is Muslim. We did a lot of research online to find that it was potentially dangerous for a European woman to walk around the town of Marrakesh with her shoulders, breasts or legs showing.

My friends and I packed appropriately, so that we were able to cover out bodies. I was excited to experience a different culture, it seemed new and strange to me. We arrived at the hotel and it appeared very westernized, with most women wearing clothes similar to my culture, shorts, skirts and sarongs. It looked like a standard hotel, where people lazed around the pool in swim suits, including women. I was thinking perhaps maybe we had read about a different part of Morocco. I did not see any difference between this hotel and one, say, in Spain. I felt happy, excited and comfortable. Oberg (1960) concept states that cultural shock occurs in four different stages. When I first arrived I was at *the honeymoon stage*. I was happy and content, I felt safe. I had packed appropriate clothing just in case, and I was able to carry on with the normal things that I do on holiday such as drinking alcohol, eating good food and sunbathing by the swimming pool. However, it appeared that at this honeymoon stage, I was "unrealistically positive" (Ferraro, 2006, p.154.)

My first trip into the center of Marrakesh was a very negative one. There were significant differences between Moroccan culture and British culture. Thousands of men and children were out on the streets at 10/11pm, attending the call for prayer. Unmarried daughters were not allowed out at night. There were significantly more men out in Marrakesh than women. Men would rarely socialize with other women, unless the woman was their wife. Men would stare at us and sometimes almost harass us. I was shocked and disgusted. In English, women are now given equal rights. What sex you are does not necessarily cause a barrier in your life, you can talk to who you want, dress how you want and express yourself however you want. I felt sympathy towards the women in this country. They had to cover their bodies in sweltering heat, sometimes only just showing their eyes. I felt extremely uncomfortable walking around Marrakesh because of the way men treated me. I was very unfamiliar with this culture and the surroundings. The first few days of the holiday I preferred to stay in the familiar surroundings of the hotel, where I felt I had more freedom, than to go out into Marrakesh and subject myself to the uncomfortable situation that I had to face. At this point, I was at the second stage of Oberg's cultural shock stages, known as *irritation and hostility*. I felt that I had blown these small

differences between the way we have to dress and the way men treat women, "out of proportion." (Ferraro, 2006, p.154.) These small problems had become huge obstacles for me, and I had a distorted view of Moroccan culture at this point. I had very little understanding of Islam at the time, and merely thought the men were very perverse and the women were severely mistreated.

However, after a week or two I adjusted to it, and I started to gain an understanding. I realized that their actions were normal for them, and the underlying core meaning of these actions lies with their religion. I began to "negotiate daily life on my own." (Irwin, 2008, p.3.) The Moroccan culture became more predictable, it was inevitable that we would be stared at and called out to. We became accustomed to Morocco's behavioral norms. Although the difficulties of being harassed still remained, I was able to deal with them. Oberg refers to this stage as *gradual adjustment* (Oberg 1960). My irritation and my hostility towards the people of Morocco and the country itself was beginning to fade and turning into an understanding and an effort to adjust.

Towards the end of the one month stay of Morocco, I began to adjust myself further to their culture. I was thoroughly enjoying myself there; I became familiar with their routines and their religion. I had a new found respect for their religion and for the women who sacrificed so much for it, and for their husbands and children. I appreciated their way of life. I was lucky, because I had now reached stage four of Oberg's stages of cultural shock. This is known as *Biculturalism*. I was able to function in both my culture at home, in England, and Morocco's culture. Not many people reach stage 4 (Ferraro, 2006, p.154)

Although the culture shock that I experienced in Morocco may initially appear to be a negative experience, looking back I feel that it was extremely positive. By the end of my month in Morocco I had fell in love with the country. With its beautiful mountains and building, I began to appreciate it. This experience enabled me to grow as a person, to be able to understand and integrate myself into a completely contrasting culture, to that of where I live. I learnt a lot about Islam and its' people. It also taught me to appreciate how lucky I am to have so much freedom and opportunities here in England. The experience taught me to have more respect for different cultures.

Work Count: 1200

## **Appendix**

## **References**

Ferraro, G.P. (2006) *The Cultural Dimensions of International Business*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edn. New Jersey: Pearson.

Mead, R and Andrews, T.G. (2009) *International Management*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Sussex: Wiley

Irwin, R. (2006) "Culture shock: negotiating feelings in the field" *Anthropology Matters Journal*, 9 (1). [Online] Available at <http://www.anthropologymatters.com/> (Accessed: 27 October 2011)

## **Further Reading**

Furnham, A. and S. Bochner (1986) *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments*. London and New York: Methuen.

Pederson, P. (1995) *The Five Stages of Culture Shock*, United States: Greenwood Press

## **Reflection on the key skills developed by this assignment**

The provision of opportunities for you to develop your key skills is an important part of the design of the courses within the undergraduate business programmes on offer at Kingston Business School

and its Partner Colleges.

This sheet, which **MUST** be attached to each piece of coursework in order for the coursework to have been properly submitted, has been designed to provide you with an opportunity to review what you have learned, to comment on what you might do differently next time and to identify opportunities for further, related learning. This permits you to monitor and improve upon your own performance. You should keep a copy of this sheet and of the feedback you receive on the coursework in your Personal Development Record. You should also include reflection on the mark and feedback for the coursework in your record.

You will find an explanation of the Key Skills in your Personal Development folder.

<b>Give your ID number and identify the coursework here in case this sheet becomes detached from the topsheet:</b>		
<b>ID Number: k0711715</b>		<b>Name: Miss Sian Gillard</b>
<b>Coursework: BS2301 Culture and International Business - Individual Portfolio</b>		
<b>Key Skills Area</b>	<b>Key Skills Elements</b>	<b>Student Comments on the extent to which (if at all) the skill has been developed by this piece of coursework</b>
<b>1. Communication</b>		N/A
<b>2. Numeracy</b>		N/A
<b>3. ICT</b>	Internet Word Processor Google Scholar	My knowledge about Google Scholar and Google Books increased significantly. I became more familiar with Microsoft Word. I used the internet to source a lot of information and for research. I found a number of very interesting and useful websites about culture and culture issues. These will help me for future assignments and also for the exam in January.
<b>4. Teamwork</b>		N/A
<b>5. Independent learning</b>	Time Management. Researching.	This is the key skills area where I feel I have improved the most. Because this was an individual assignment, I was working on my own. I feel that I managed my time well with this assignment; I started thinking about it very early on, enabling me to do a lot of research on the topic. I learned how to take things slowly and not to panic. Planning was vital in order for me to complete this assignment slowly and well before the deadline. I feel I am using the library an



		<b>Increased amount compared to third year, I find it extremely useful. I feel that learning “around” the subject and doing an in-depth research helps me to write to the best of my ability. I learnt how to use my time in the library wisely,</b>
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Finally, please outline what steps you will be taking to develop these capabilities further as a consequence of completing this assignment:

As a consequence of completing this assignment, I'm going to ensure that I manage my time properly, like I have here, for all my assignments. It enables me to give myself time to think about the assignment, and to reflect upon it. I will develop these skills further by planning my weeks more to ensure that no hours during the day are wasted.

I will also use the journals and the articles in the library to source more information and to do more research.

During this assignment I learn that I am more than capable to source information and easily relate it to my assignment. I will continue to practice this further and ensure that I have no self-doubt.