



**PROGRAM: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR EXPERTS
2023- 2024**

For more information please contact Arjan Verdooren: A.Verdooren@kit.nl

General approach

All sessions will take place on zoom and will last 2,5 hours (13.00-15.30 CET). The sessions will contain lecture as well as interactive parts with exercises and discussion in small groups. They build on academic theory and hence will involve discussion of social scientific concepts, ideas and controversies. We aim to present this in an accessible way, with recurrent reflection on practical implications and applications.

The course largely builds on the book 'Diversity Competence-Cultures Don't Meet, People Do' by Edwin Hoffman and Arjan Verdooren, and book chapters can be read before or after the sessions to provide more depth (though this is not mandatory). Additional literature as well as suggestions for reflection or practice between the sessions will also be provided. The course consists of the following sessions and content¹:

1. Culture and intercultural interaction

In this first session, we explore the concept of culture, some of the main controversies around it as well as different approaches to resolving those. Based on a revised understanding of culture, we try to come to an understanding of the process and main challenges of intercultural interaction.

Topics:

- A short history of culture as a concept
- Controversies and problems around 'culture'
- Metaphors and revised approaches for culture in ICC
- Intercultural interaction: from 'cultural clashes' to 'partial unfamiliarity'
- Intercultural challenges: ethnocentrism and essentialism

2. Values, worldviews and communication styles

In this session, we explore some of the main aspects of cultural difference and approaches to understanding, comparing and categorizing these. In addition, we reflect on the problems, and pitfalls of these approaches, as well as opportunities to avoid them.

Topics:

- Cultural dimension models: possibilities and problems
- Values, worldviews and logics
- Are values overvalued?

¹ The exact content of sessions may differ slightly based on participants learning goals and program development



3. Identity and power

In this session, we discuss how the membership of certain groups as such impact interactions- beyond the cultural repertoires that these groups provide access to. How do the positions of these groups as such, in relation to other groups and to global and societal (power) structures impact the interactions of their members?

And how does language -often inadvertently- express or activate different perceptions or experiences of identity, (power) relations and group belonging?

Topics:

- Social identity theories
- In- out group mechanisms and perceptions
- Inter group relations and communication
- A system theoretical approach to communication

4. (Non) Verbal language

Intercultural interactions can often be impacted as well by factors related to language, both verbally as well as non-verbally. This can become especially complex when issues of power and status come into play. In this session, we try to unpack all these aspects that are not particularly related to *what* is communicated, but *how*.

Topics:

- Language command, and language positions
- Translation and language transfer
- Communication styles across groups and individuals
- Non verbal language (e.g. gestures, physical distance, eye contact)
- Language and power

5. Ethics and dialogue

An undervalued aspect of intercultural interactions is that they can lead to ethical challenges and dilemmas, when others' behaviours or ideas seem in violation with one's own ethical position or commitment. Often, people feel conflicted between defending universal human rights and needs, and the acknowledgment of differences in experiences, values, and morals. In this session, we discuss different relevant frameworks, ideas and approaches to (intercultural) ethics. This leads us to dialogue as an indispensable tool to inquire into both differences and similarities.

Topics:

- Universalism, Relativism and Pluralism
- Different approaches to identifying universal needs
- Human Rights and cultural compatibility
- Dialogue as a tool for intercultural communication

6. Communication and the TOPOI Model



In this session, we synthesize many of the discussed insights in the approach of the TOPOI model. This is a practice-theoretical heuristic tool, that focusses on communicative areas in (intercultural) interaction, rather than culture *per se*. It translates cultural and other factors into identifiable, operational fields of communication. The model then functions as a lens to zoom in on interactions in order to analyze, reflect on and sensitize to differences as they occur in interaction.

Topics:

- Backgrounds and main assumptions of the model
- The different areas: Tongue, Order, Persons, Organization, Intentions
- Application of the model on case situations
- Integrating the model into course, programs, training, etc.

7. Intercultural learning

In this last session, we consider several approaches and theories regarding the process of intercultural learning: how do people learn and become more competent in interacting in culturally diverse environments? We draw both on academic theory and studies, as well as on the experiences with providing intercultural training at the Royal Tropical Institute over the course of several decades.

Topics:

- Cultural knowledge versus intercultural competence
- The measurement of intercultural competences
- Instrumental versus transformative learning
- Process based approaches to intercultural learning
- The KIT vision on intercultural learning