The definition of transparency in the context of different cultures and societies

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Content of my presentation

• Understanding the issue
  – What is transparency, culture, society?
  – Our world: differences and striking similarities
  – Do my words carry my thoughts?
• 7 Challenges
• 7 Tips
• Conclusions
Transparency?

- **Media transparency**, in the communications industry
- **Government transparency**
- **Radical transparency** in management
- **Corporate transparency** in business operations
- **Transparency (behavior)**, a metaphor implying visibility in contexts related to the behavior of individuals or groups
- **Transparency (behavior)**, performing in such a way that it is easy for the agent or others to see what's wrong, e.g., the standard way to make change at a point of sale
- **Transparency (linguistic)**, a term used in linguistics and the philosophy of language
- **Transparency (market)**, a term in economics
- **Transparency (philosophy)**, an adjective applied to a state in which the subject can be aware of being in that state
- **Transparency (social)**, the social value of access to information held by centers of authority
- **Transparency (trade)**, the formal principle of the WTO that a country’s policies and regulations affecting foreign trade should be clearly communicated to its trading partners.
- **Transparency International**, an organization working for governance, corporate, banking and association transparency

- *any many others*....
Transparent?

It’s good for you,
I know,
I’m THE expert!
Transparent?
1. Understanding the issue
"You can get sick by what you put in your mouth, but you can get hurt by what comes out of your mouth."

Chinese proverb
Transparency in the context of different cultures and societies; What is “Culture”?  

• Culture (Latin: cultura) is a term that has many different inter-related meanings  
• For example, in 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions of "culture“  
• The set of a shared system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms of behaviours  
• It refers to coherent groups of people  
• Sub-groups: organizational cultures like that of UN and the IAEA
Cultures differ along many dimensions

Four of the most important are:

- **Directness** (get to the point versus imply the messages)
- **Hierarchy** (follow orders versus engage in debate)
- **Consensus** (‘voting’ is accepted versus unanimity is required)
- **Individualism** (individual winners versus team effectiveness; when can you win alone?)
Transparency in the context of different cultures and societies; What is “Society”?  

• **States**: There are 191 – 196 states in the world  
• **Languages**: about 6900 (http://www.sil.org/worldwide.html)  
  – Europe: 239 spoken languages  
  – Africa: more than 2000 languages  
  – about 500 ”dying languages”  
• **Different Cultures**: ???
• IAEA has 151 Member States
• In which even more languages are spoken
• Cultural differences
  – Societies
  – Organizational cultures (UN culture)
However, surprising similarities

But you, I, she, he, all of us in the world, we have some things in common
Transparency; We all want to succeed and be happy in our lives

- *In today’s world your success depends on others; your success is often made or jeopardized by others*

- (Intercultural) communication is a key to success
Striking similarities in communication

- There are six facial expressions common to all of us in the whole world;
- Around the world, we all understand them without any common words or language!
Fear

Anger
Other feelings that can be understood by most of people without words

Bored
Concentration
Confusion
Desire
Excitement
Empathy
Frustration
Flirt
Love
There are masters of Transparency,
In every culture
In every society
Masters of transparency

Deep in human “hard-drives!!!”
Transparecy; “Do my words carry my thoughts?”

- I have a thought
- I **code** it in words
- I speak words to you; verbally and non-verbally
- You hear and see me
- **You de-code** it
- My words become a thought in you
- *Did my words carry my thought to you?*
Communication, coding and decoding depends on our cultural backgrounds.
“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place”

Sir Bernand Shaw
2. Challenges and problems
Challenge 1: We come with different rights, values, and needs

• Needs, values, rights: Many assumed, unspoken, (e.g. for safety, security, love, a sense of belonging to a group, self-esteem, and the ability to attain one's goals).
• Personal security, dignity, and control: issues will be very different
• rigidly class-based culture meets a discussing flat-organized culture
Challenge 2: Misinterpreting each other's motives

- Individuals, organizational units: section, division, departments
- For instance, in some cultures an independent figure of self is dominant and valued.
  - This independent figure is characterized by a sense of self relatively distinct from others and the environment.
- In interdependent cultures, an interdependent figure of self is dominant.
  - There is a much greater emphasis on the interrelatedness of the individual to others and the environment, the self is meaningful only (or primarily) in the context of social relationships, duties, and roles.
Challenge 3: Language difficulties

- Hard to communicate not only due to language barrier but also affected by culture styles
- “Lost in translation”: The same word can translate to different things to people from different cultures
  - When translation has to be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstandings increases
- The one difficulty that comes into play is Paralanguage, “Language refers to what is said, Paralanguage refers to how it is said”
Challenge 4: Power relationships

- Who is on top of the social, economic, and/or political hierarchy
- “End result” is the driver in some other cultures
- The relationships between sex, racial or ethnic groups, economic jealousy
- Nations may assert that their political systems are superior
- Difficult to resolve because no-one wants to be the loser
- What may appear just or fair to one group can seem unjust to an opposing group
“It is amazing how much you can accomplish when it doesn't matter who gets the credit.”
Challenge 5: “To inform and involve others or not to, that’s the question?”

• Basic assumption on information availability differs (even in Europe: public vs. confidential)
• Internationally concept of “informing and involving the public” differs even if it be a legal commitment (EIA)
• Some cultures assume that the individuals know very little about what they are being told, and therefore must be given a lot of background information
• Some give very little background information
Challenge 6: Same words can carry different thoughts

• **What** I say

• **how** I say, **how I appear** when I say it
  – Some more sensitive to intonations and non-verbal signs
  – Even logically the same words should convey the same meaning, volume, rate, and emphasis placed on those words can change the meaning of the phrase and purpose
Challenge 7: What is OK in one country, can be wrong in another country

For example:
- Being late from a meeting
- Ways in education
- Ways to communicate
Tips
Tip 1: Show simply respect

- Simple everyday things
- Respecting differences
- Use these differences to challenge your own assumptions about the "right" way of doing things and as a chance to learn new ways to solve problems
- Harness diversity
  - Better problem solving power
  - Specialists in local cultures
Tip 2: Never assume they can understand you
Tip 2: Never assume they can understand you (cont.)
Correct or understandable?
Tip 2: Never assume they can understand you (cont.)

It's important to say “I don’t understand?”
Tip 2: Never assume they can understand you (cont.)
Transparent?
Tip 2: Never assume they can understand you (cont.)

Letters, statements, guides, manuals, instructions
Tip 3: Slow Down to avoid misunderstandings

- If you have some difficulty understanding your colleagues, they probably have the same difficulty understanding you.
- The faster you talk, the more difficult you are to understand.
Tip 3: Slow Down to avoid misunderstandings (cont.)

- Intellectual to be short & clear, or long and complicated?
- Respect the local communication formalities and styles
Tip 4: Better to be “doctor” than “judge”

- Diagnose well, then act for better
  - 1st: DO NO HARM!
- Rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the problem, search for ways to make the communication work
- Listen actively and empathetically
- Honour others' opinions about what is going on
Tip 5: Be sensitive when communication goes from casual to crucial

Opposing opinions

Crusial conversations

Strong emotions

High Stakes

*When it matters most, we often do our worst!*
Tip 6: Watch your body language; wrong message
Tip 7: one-size-does-NOT-fit all

• Use generalizations rather to understand better and appreciate other multifaceted human beings
• Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behaviour of any particular individual
• We are all more complicated than any cultural or societal norm could suggest
Conclusions

• Transparency is both complex and simple
• Many differences, many similarities
  – Certainly fascinating and rewarding
• Always start by assuming the best of intentions of others!
• Our actions speak much louder than our words!