

Do international
cultures affect
Project
Management?

Culture is the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought

(PMI)

“Apart from technical and human-side skills, culture plays a significant role, generating both positive and negative impact in project teams since all the team members bring their own culture into the team, and that culture shapes the core decision making process within the team.”

Henrie and Sousa-Poza (2005)

Cultural Influences

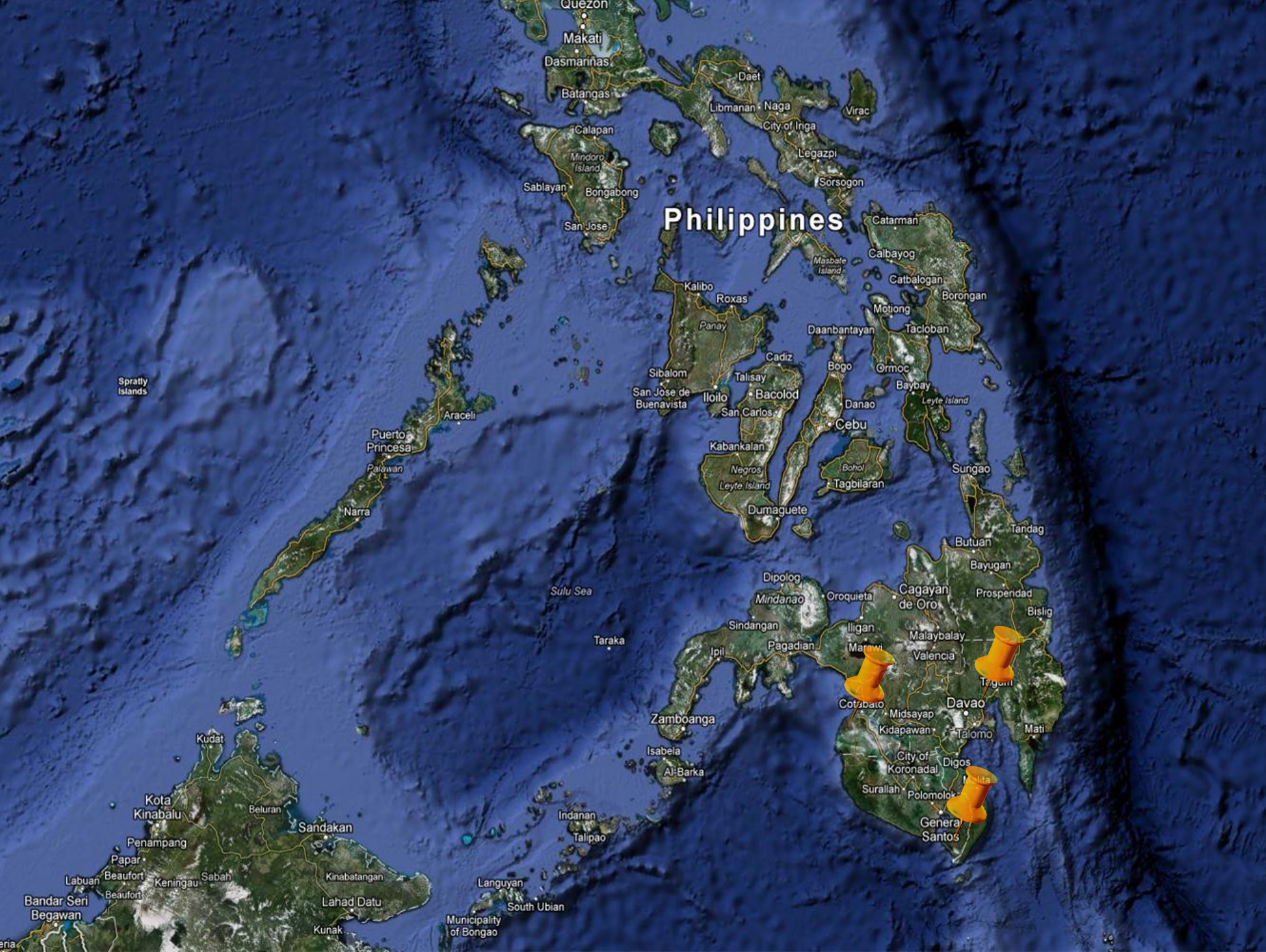
- Language
- Religion
- Work ethic
- Organisational culture
- Reporting
- Communication
- Behaviours
- Economic Conditions

Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM)

Joint AusAID/Dept. Education, Philippines project

BEAM

- Aimed to develop the quality of and access to basic education through:
 - School Management
 - Teacher Training
 - Indigenous and Muslim Education
 - Tertiary teacher education
 - Learning materials development
- Elementary, Secondary, Tertiary and Administration levels in 5822 schools across three Regions
- 5-Year, \$50m project



- Team of Australian and Filipino advisors
- Teachers seconded:
 - Training
 - Materials Development
 - Assessment
 - Monitoring and Evaluation



A bit about the Philippines

- The United States introduced and developed the educational system, together with the English language, into the Philippines.
- population is approaching 100 million with a mixture of Indo-Malay, Chinese and Spanish descent.

Language

- 87 native dialects spoken throughout the Philippines, the three main ones being Tagalog, Cebuano and Ilocano.
- English is the medium of instruction for English, Mathematics and Science in schools.
- Local dialects used otherwise.
- Australian accent was difficult for the locals.

Religion

- 80% of the population are Roman Catholic
 - Meetings, ceremonies begin and end with prayer.
- Muslim Filipinos constitute 5% of the population nationally
 - Concentrated mainly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
 - Awareness of their needs are required, especially during Ramadan
 - Political tensions exists between Muslims and Christians, but not seen at professional level.

Work Ethic

- Attitudes to deadlines and punctuality can be a cause of frustration
 - Tolerance and patience is a virtue indeed
- “...but it is our culture” can be an excuse for tardiness



- The BEAM project team were willing to adopt “western” ethic – we controlled the money!

Reporting

- Reporting lines are well defined and respected (often despite competence)



- A relatively low uncertainty-avoidance culture, founded on trusting relationships
- Verbal rather than written reporting is therefore acceptable

Economic conditions

- A large proportion of the population live below the poverty line
- Access to basic education, health and welfare is restricted
- Reform projects in education face problems with fundamental lack of resources
- Corruption, corruption, corruption



A faint map of Saudi Arabia serves as the background for the top half of the slide. Various cities are labeled, including Alsarar, Jubail, Al Manamah, Al Jasra, Al Aali, Ad Dahirah, Al Khawr, Al Hofuf, Dukhan, Alkhurais, Doha, Al Wakrah, and Al Rahba. The title 'About Qatar' is centered over the map in a large, blue, serif font.

About Qatar

- Population of 1.9 million
 - 400,000 are Qataris
 - Others from more than 200 countries.
- World's largest exporter of LNG
- Second highest per-capita income country



Qatar Project Management



- manages mega projects in various locations around the world.
- international team with global experience with such projects.
- 90% of the workforce is expat



Middle Eastern Culture

- The Middle East is an area which carries many stereotypes and myths
- great diversity within the region, with a common religion, language and culture



Islam

- Islam permeates all levels of society.
- It provides guidance, values and rules for personal life, community relations and ways of doing business.
- Muslims are obliged to pray five times a day.
- Daily routines, appointments and meetings must be fitted in appropriately around prayer times.
- Friday is the day for congregational prayers and it is obligatory for all males to attend

Ramadan

The background of the slide features a warm, golden-yellow sunset sky. In the foreground, the silhouettes of two people are visible against the bright light. One person is standing and facing away from the viewer, with their arms raised in a gesture of prayer or supplication. To their right, another person is kneeling or sitting in a similar prayerful posture. The overall mood is peaceful and spiritual.

- During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn till dusk which involves refraining from eating, drinking or smoking.
- Business hours are generally reduced
- There are two major festivals of note - *Eid al-Fitr* follows Ramadan and *Eid al-Adha* follows the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

Gender



- The roles of men and women are far more defined in the Arab culture.
- Interaction between the sexes is still frowned upon in certain arenas.
- Qatar has a more liberal attitude to women than some other middle eastern counties.

Business is Personal

- Westerners might use the words chaotic, disorganised and frustrating when doing business.
- Arabs do not separate professional and personal life.
- Doing business revolves much more around personal relationships, family ties, trust and honour.
- It is crucial that business relationships are built on mutual friendship and trust.



The Spoken Word

- The Middle Eastern culture places more value on someone's word as opposed to a written agreement.
- A person's word is connected to their honour.
- Contracts are viewed as memorandums of understanding rather than binding, fixed agreements.
- Failure to deliver as promised will result in loss of honour.

Meetings

- Meetings should not be made too far in advance as changes in personal circumstances may impact your appointment
- Initial meetings are all about relationship building.
- Meetings can be chaotic. People may enter the meeting room unannounced and proceed to discuss their own agendas.
- Although the Arabs place a high emphasis on punctuality they rarely practice it themselves.

Negotiations

A background image showing two men shaking hands. On the left is a man in a white thobe and ghutra. On the right is a man in a grey suit and tie. They are both smiling. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

- Arabs were a trading people and are excellent negotiators.
- Haggling takes places everywhere, whether at the shop or in the board room.
- Decisions are made slowly.
- Bureaucratic formalities tend to add to delays.
- High pressure tactics will be counter-productive.

Take-aways

- Sharing of common values, fundamental respect and interest in human development are effective factors in managing projects in any environment.
- There are competent people wherever you are
- Generalisations can be counter-productive