



Introduction to Danish Culture

Intro week 2010
University of Aarhus

creating cultural competence

Typical frustrations about the Danes

- Why can you not tell who is in charge?
- Why do you talk so much in order to take a decision?
- Why do you need that many breaks?
- Why are the Danes so relaxed and informal?
- Why do the Danes seem so cold and rude?
- Why do people not help me?
- Why does everybody leave at 4 pm.?
- Why is it so hard to become friends with the Danes?

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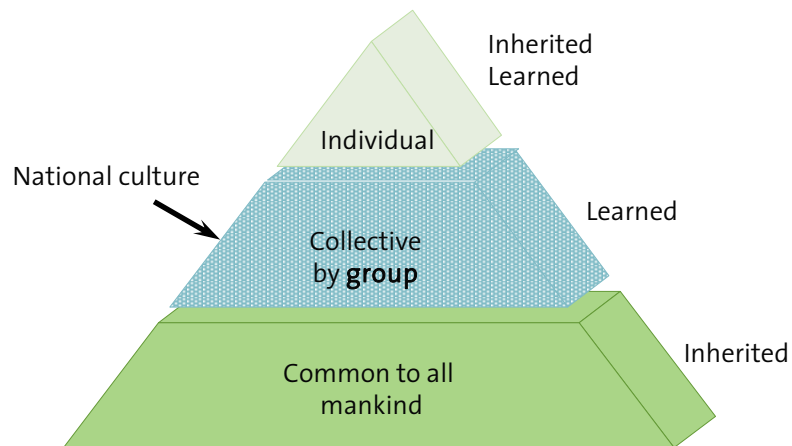
Aim of today: To create trust

- Understand the Danish way of behaviour and communication
- Know what motivates the Danes
- Assess them against their own standards



Create credibility and trust

Human behaviour:



Cultural bias

What is like our own culture
is normal and *“good”*

What is different from our own culture
is abnormal and *“bad”*

Cultural filter

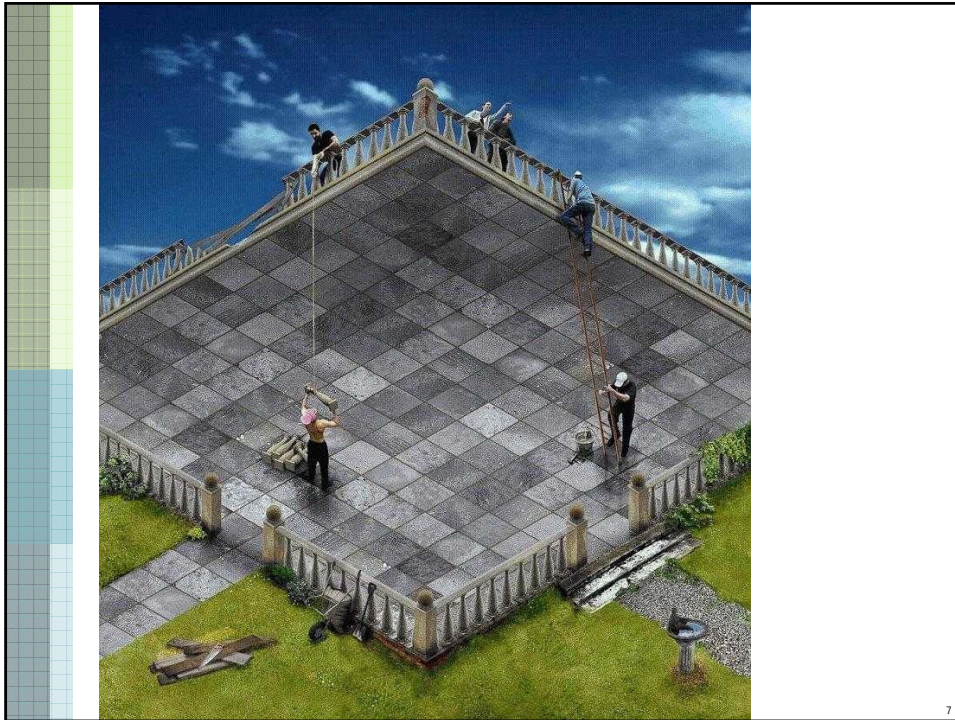
Said about a Dane:

By a Swede:

- The Latinos of Scandinavia
- Relaxed
- Straight forward
- Good negotiators
- Self-centred

By an American:

- *Reserved*
- *Difficult to figure out*
- *Always changing their minds*
- *Scared of conflicts*
- *Socialism*



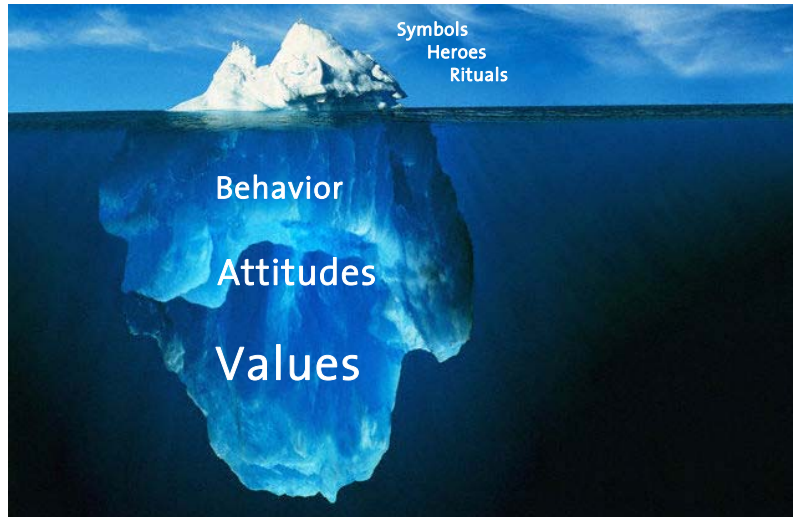
STUDENT GUIDE 2010/2011 Study Methods:

Teaching at Aarhus University is generally structured around lectures, tutorials (teaching in small groups) and *practical* exercises. *Active participation* is expected from students.

Students regularly organise guest lectures and often form *study groups* among themselves to discuss class topics and to *help each other*. There is considerable *interaction between students and professors*, and students often make group presentations in class.

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The cultural iceberg



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Danish cultural values

The major cultural values of the Danes are:

1. Egalitarian
2. Individualistic
3. Modesty and Quality of Life
4. Practical and informal



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1. Denmark: Equalitarian

- High acceptance of equality in society
- Decision making: Consultation and open disagreement
- Power does not give privileges



Impact on Danish learning environment

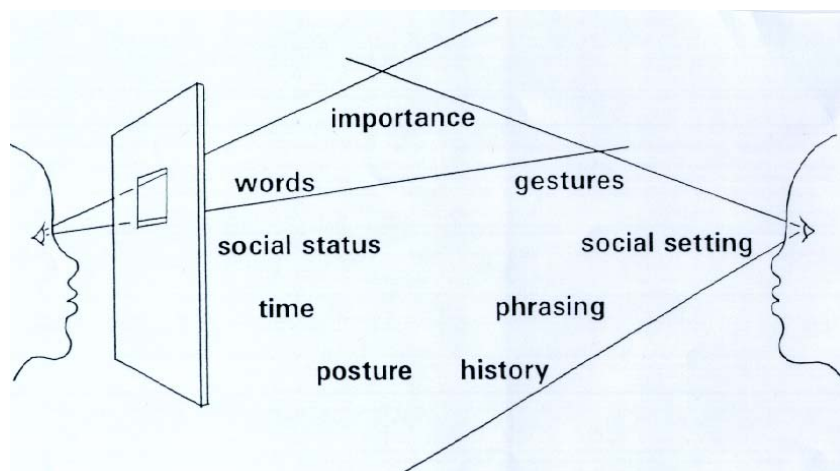
- Easy access to professors
- Ideal professor is a “coach”
- Open and informal relations
- Two-way communication
- Information flows fluid
- Intellectual disagreements are okay

2. Denmark: Individualistic

- Direct / outspoken form of communication
- Task-oriented. Start the job - don't wait for relationships first
- No "special" treatment given or expected
- Freedom with responsibility



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Edward T. Hall - Silent language

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Presentation style is swift & concise



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The Danes love to debate

Remember:

- The Danes are straight forward – very frank
- If you disagree – speak up
- Address the issue – not the person
- We are debating not arguing – no personal feelings involved

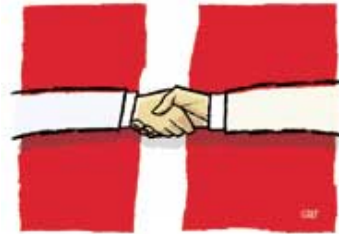
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Social interaction

- Do not expect a Dane to introduce you
- Ask questions / ask for help
- Firm hand shake & eye contact
- Greet upon arrival and when leaving



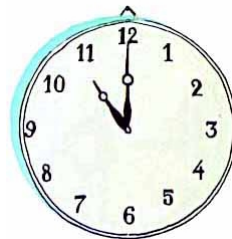
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A word is a word

A Dane will honour his word and expects the same of you.

Be careful about estimates

- I will be back in 5 minutes
- I will have it done in two days...



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Personal space



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- Communication style is direct
- Active participation in discussions, critical thinking
- Responsible for own planning and learning
- No hard feelings even if you disagree openly
- Distant relationships (work/study life vs. private life)
- Written reports: avoid copying
- Be prepared – be on time

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3. Consensus and Modesty



- Avoid to show off
- Competition among peers not accepted
- Danes are ambitious – but for personal fulfilment
- Decision making
- Debates and consensus
- Remember time for “hygge”

“Hygge” – is so very Danish

- Creating intimacy, relaxation, hospitality, warmth, friendliness, geniality, harmony and contentment (>cosiness)
- Giving priority to **small pleasures** – can describe both people, situations and locations



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- Interactive and dialogue based teaching
- People understate and underestimate their performances
- Danes admire friendliness, professionalism and modesty
- Don't expect open praise even if you perform well
- Participation in group work & reaching real consensus is more important than a fast decision by the most capable

4. Denmark: Practical & informal



- Comfortable in “grey-zone” situations
- Anti-bureaucratic and emotional horror of rules/laws - but we follow the rules we make !
- Do not show frustrations
- Being practical & using common sense is more valued than titles and experts

Danish broadmindedness

is best summed up in a popular book for children:

“You should not bother others. You should be nice and kind.

Otherwise you can do as you please.”

Police chief Bastian, “People and Robbers of Cardemon Town”



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- Professors might not have the “right” answer! Don’t doubt his/hers competence
- A simple and practical solution preferred to a complex/academic one
- If the learning situation looks “unstructured” don’t get frustrated
- Risk taking is favoured (taking initiative)
- Questions are encouraged
- Relaxed / informal environment
 - use “du” (you) and first name

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Further reading...

- CultureShock Denmark, *Marshall Cavendish Editions*
- Xenophobe's guide to the Danes
- The Worktrotter Guide to Denmark, *www.worktrotter.dk*

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