



# **AFGHANISTAN IN THE LEWIS MODEL**

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Abstract  Afghanistan with a newly developing economy has little to no information on its customers in order to attract foreign investors and venture capitalists. A customer's behaviour is defined by his/her culture, therefore, this thesis has gathered information on Afghan culture and giving evidence to support the claim it has defined where in the Lewis Model Afghans culturally fit  The aim of the research is to lesson the gap which exists between Afghans and those who want to conduct business in Afghanistan. Qualitative method is the main method used in the study.  The research objectives are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering general information on Afghan culture</li> <li>• Information found being compared to the categories of culture in the book, When Cultures Collide</li> <li>• Placing Afghanistan in its appropriate place on the Lewis Model</li> </ul> The research defines Afghans as multi-active people, who are extroverts and put emphasis on human-transaction. Religion has an important role in the society, males and females are not considered equal. Creating relationships are considered more important than building empires.  The results are accurate in general, but further study is needed as the sample for this study was limited. It is suggested that a larger sample should be studied using similar methods.		
Keywords Afghanistan, Afghans, culture, the Lewis Model, multi-active, Muslims, Islam, Allah, When Cultures Collide, developing, economy		
Miscellaneous		

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# 1 INTRODUCTION:

Since we are all living in a global village, a majority of the countries have embraced the idea of globalisation. Afghanistan is not an exception; it has opened its markets to all countries and their companies from East to West.

Afghanistan, a newly 'independent' country with a developing economy, has little or no expertise in attracting and dealing with countries or their respective companies. Many multinational firms have shown interest in the Afghan market and some have already started operating in the country because of the great influx of foreign aid.

There is very little information available about the Afghan market or its customers in general. Aside from a vast number of potential customers, the market must provide suitable information and incentives for companies, venture capitalists, or future investors before they commit.

In order to get a general view of the country as a potential market for a product, companies need to do market research. This can only be accomplished if there is sufficient information available on existing and potential customers. In the case of Afghanistan; there is little or no information available to the general public.

BuilderCom, a start-up company from Finland wanting to expand its customer base around the world, wanted marketing research to be done on Afghanistan as a potential market for their future operations.

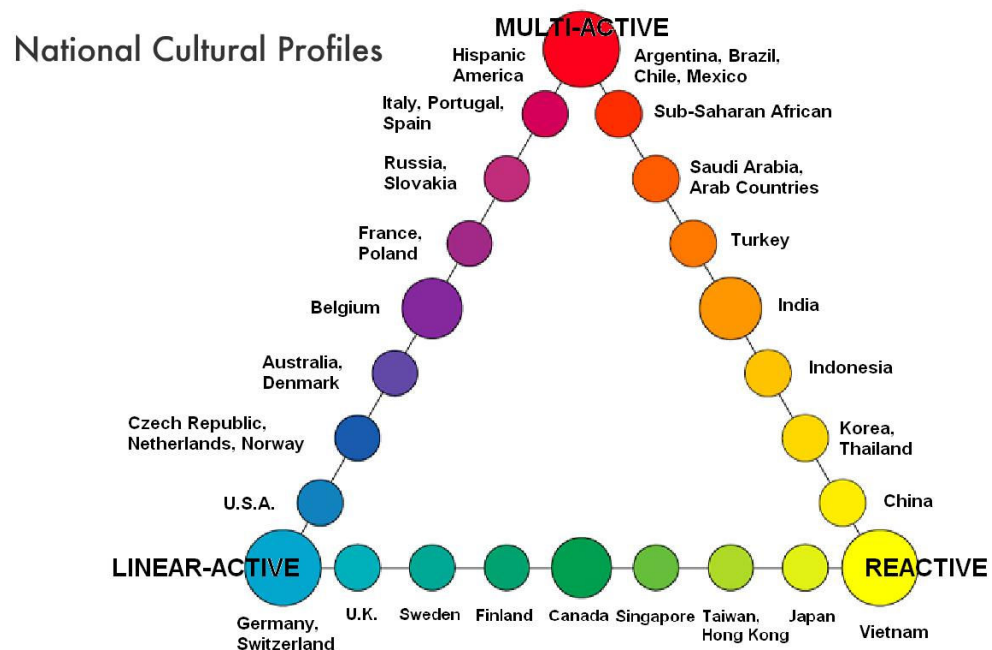
Afghans with their cautious nature do not give out information easily. In order to get information from them, one needs to build a bond and develop a relationship with them. For this reason, I started working for a private university as a lecturer and as their student affairs officer.

After living and working in the country and speaking to Afghans who have experience in working life, it was clear to me that there was a need to gather more information from the working professionals of that region. Since there was no background information available on Afghan culture or their way of doing business, I found that

working directly with the locals would have been difficult. Due to the reasons mentioned above, the topic of the thesis along with the subject had to be changed.

For the specific topic of Afghan culture in general I have looked through books, databases and web pages. It is hard to find the word ‘culture’ together with the word ‘Afghan’. Even Afghans themselves do not know what to say about their culture. They all generally assume that since they are Muslims, they most certainly possess the qualities of Muslims in other countries, or as they are located between Iran and Pakistan, they most likely have similar habits as their neighbors. How true that is, they do not know as they do not have any available data.

A very informative and useful book on cross-cultural leadership is; When cultures Collide, Leading across Cultures, by Richard D. Lewis. It has many of the countries in Asia listed and has put them into one of three cultural categories: Linear-Active, Reactive, and Multi-Active. Unfortunately this book does not contain any information on Afghanistan.



**Figure 1: National Cultural Profiles (the Lewis Model) (Meeting Professionals International, 2008, with some modification)**

Since defining every aspect of a society, studying all of the areas of working life, and learning each position-holders habit is difficult, I only tried to deduce where the Afghan culture would fit within this model.

Throughout my research, and to help me find direction, I contacted Mr. Lewis. Even though he is very busy with his work and trainings in other countries, I was able to gain a lot of help from his secretaries. From these conversations, I learned that most of the research that Mr. Lewis had gathered had been observational. He conducted his research by immersing himself in those countries and becoming one of people.

The method of research for this study is also observational. The information gathered is from personal experiences as well as the experiences of friends and acquaintances. However, I want to clarify that a country's culture is as wide and vast as the number of people residing in the country. We can only point out a few factors that are common between the country's residences and the individuals or businesses that they are dealing with in hopes of finding a common ground. Throughout the research, the aim has been to gather information in order to facilitate the first step of doing business which is getting to know the culture of the country and people. (Referring to the Lewis model in the book of Richard D. Lewis, *When Cultures Collide*, p 42)

### ***1.1 Research Objectives***

Initially, general information is gathered on the Afghan culture. Next, by using the book 'When Cultures Collide' as the main source, the results found on the study are compared with information available on different culture categories. Finally, with a developed knowledge of the Afghan culture, Afghanistan is placed in an appropriate category amongst other countries in the Lewis Model.

The main objective of this research is not only to enhance the knowledge of outsiders in regards to Afghan professionals, but also to lessen the gap between them and those that come from other countries to do business.



## ***1.2 Research Question***

The main purpose of this research is to create an understanding of Afghan culture. To accomplish this we need to research and discuss our findings and answer the main question of the thesis:

- Where in the Lewis Model does Afghanistan fit?

## ***1.3 Methods of Research***

The general method of research, as mentioned earlier, is qualitative. The study consists of theoretical research and empirical research. The theoretical is completed by gathering written literature on the general culture and more specifically on Afghans if available. Furthermore we look into different theories of culture and collect information about them.

The empirical research shows the results and information found on the topic according to the format used by Mr. Lewis for country profiles and then we will discuss the conclusions and give suggestions.

## 2 DEFINING CULTURE:

Before we go into the topic of describing Afghan culture, we need to know what culture is, and what are the categories that are mentioned in the book; *When Cultures Collide*.

According to Geert Hofstede's book, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, culture is a way of thinking, feeling and potential acting which is learnt throughout our lives especially in our early childhood. We cannot learn something new unless we unlearn what we have been thought earlier and it is harder a second time to learn something than the first time. He compares this system with a computers' programming and calls it software of the mind.

Of course a human being's mind is not as simple as the CPU of a computer nor is the mind programmed the same way as a computer. Someone's behavior is partially influenced by one's mental programs, as one has the ability to diverge from the patterns. A person can always react in ways which are new, creative, odd, destructive and unexpected. (Hosftede 2005, 3)

The sources of one's mental programs lie within the social environment in which one grew up and collected one's life experiences. The programming starts within the family; it continues within the neighborhood, at school, in youth groups, at the workplace, and in the living community. (Geert Hosftede 2005, 3)

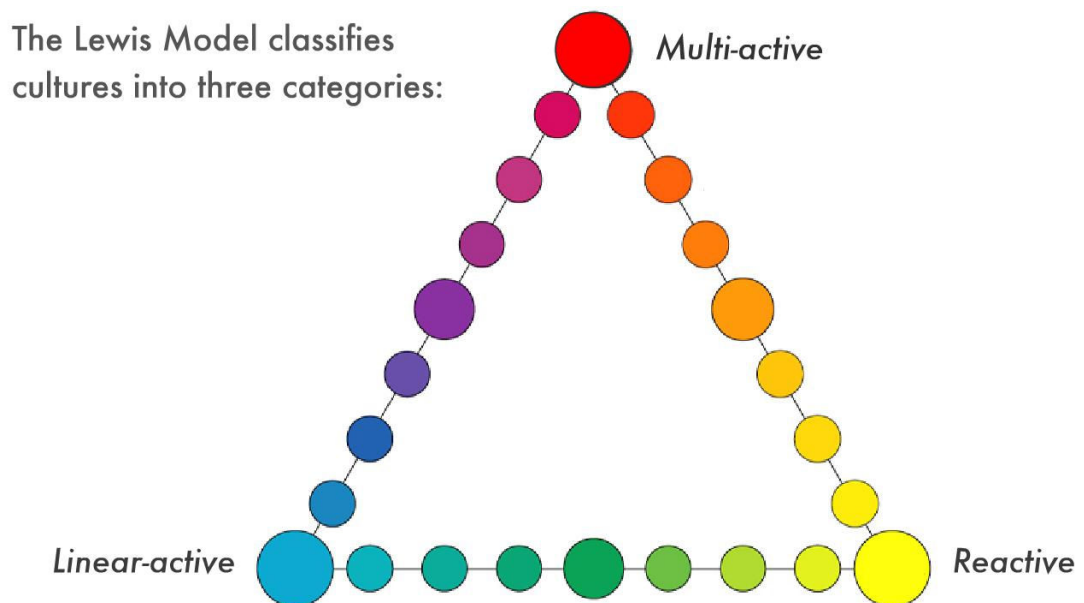
Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned. Culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is *the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others*. (Geert Hosftede 2005, 4)

Culture is a set of customs, beliefs, arts and all products of the human mind which has been developed by a specific group of people at a specific time. (Lewis, 2007, p.588.)

Culture is called a system which enables people and groups of people to deal with each other and the world other than their own. (Mole, 2007, p.8.) Culture is also defined as a mechanism which unifies people who have a common purpose, common language, common values and ideas. (Mole, 2007, p.8-9.)

### 3 CULTURE CATEGORIES ACCORDING TO THE LEWIS MODEL:

#### 3.1 *The Three Categories of Culture:*



**Figure 2: The Lewis Model (Meeting Professionals International, 2008)**

The third chapter of the book, *When Cultures Collide Leading across Cultures*, starts with the following paragraph:

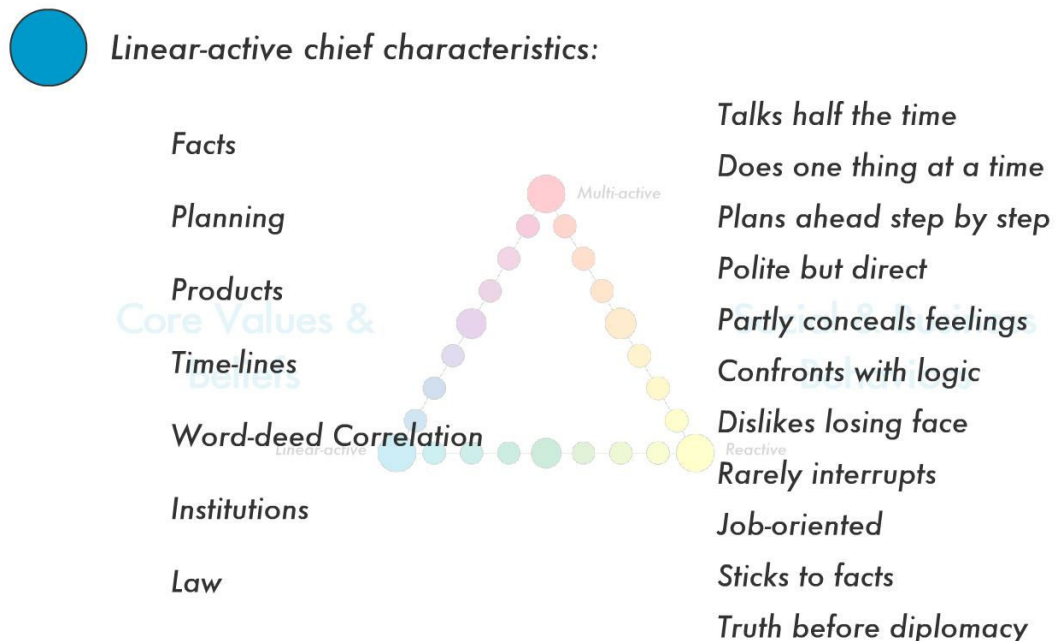
The several hundred national and organizational cultures of the world can be roughly classified into three categories: task-orientated, highly organized planners (linear-active); people-oriented, loquacious interrelators (multi-active); and introverted, respect-oriented listeners

(reactive). Italians see Germans as stiff and time-dominated; Germans see Italians Gesticulating in chaos; the Japanese observe and quietly learn from both. (Lewis, 2007, p.27.)

As we have different culture categories between nations and organizations and we are in the era where globalization has become an important part of our life and work, we need to learn about each category. This would help us understand where we fit and how we can benefit from the human resources available to us in our environment and in the society in general and our organizations in particular. However, one must not forget that all countries are not the same and every country does not have one particular culture. (Lewis, 2007, p.30.)

### 3.1.1 Linear-active Culture:

This is a culture where people are task-oriented, and do everything according to plans, do one thing at a time and do not like to change plans. (Lewis, 2007, p.30.)

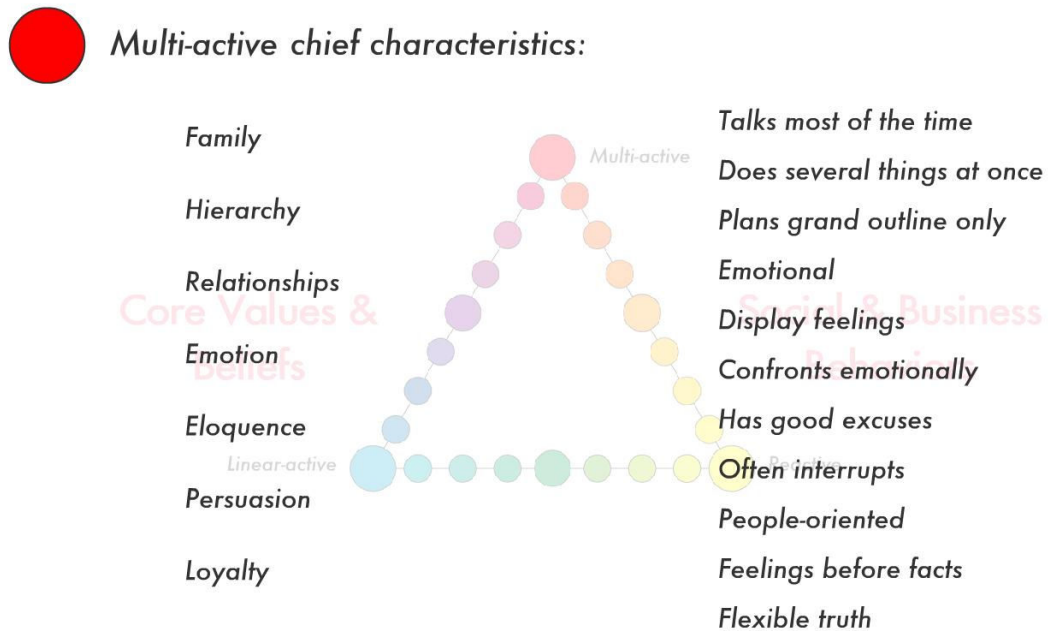


**Figure 3: Linear-Active Culture (Meeting Professionals International, 2008)**

Also considered data-oriented culture; according to Lewis, it is a culture where people gather needed information through print and other database sources. Further described as low-context culture, people in this category trust written data more and verbal communication is limited. (Lewis, 2007, p.588-9.)

### 3.1.2 Multi-active Culture:

A culture whose people are outgoing, people oriented and they tend to do many things at once, habitually in a spontaneous order. The people who belong to this culture are generally flexible with regards to their time and plans. (Lewis, 2007, 30-2.)

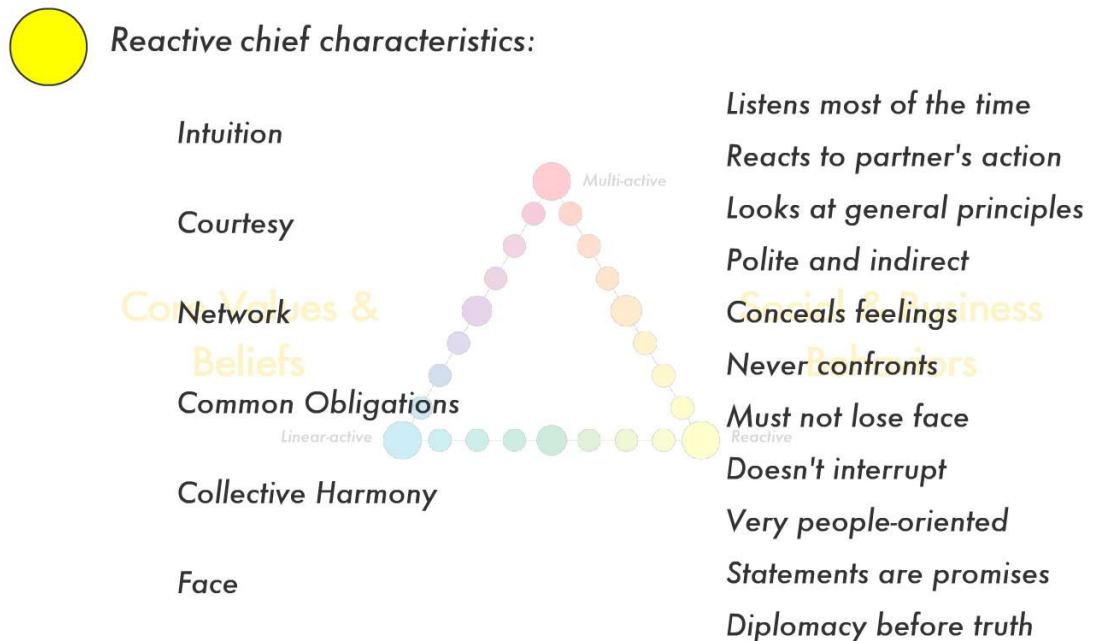


**Figure 4: Multi-Active Culture (Meeting Professionals International, 2008)**

Also named dialogue-oriented culture, where people depend on direct contacts with other people in order to gather information. Another name for this cultural group is high-context culture where networking is important and verbal communication is highly emphasized. (Lewis, 2007, p.588-9)

### 3.1.3: Reactive Culture:

A culture whose people are shy and silent, they are respect-oriented people. They hesitate before they would start any actions. They are good listeners and they respect the idea of others. They listen and create an image of who they are dealing with before they initiate anything. (Lewis, 2007, p.32-7)



**Figure 5: Reactive Culture (Meeting Professionals International, 2008)**

Also called listening culture, it is whose people are great listeners. They never interrupt a conversation, so that they could understand their partner. They have great respect for others' opinions. They will not take hasty actions, but rather wait till the ideas seem strong enough to be acted upon. (Lewis, 2007, p.588-9)

## 4 AFGHANISTAN:

### 4.1 Geography:

Afghanistan is located in South Central Asia (an important part of Silk Road), connected in the east and south with Pakistan, west with Iran, and north with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and northeast at Wakhan Corridor with China. (World Fact Book 2008)

- Area: 647,500 sq km
- Population: 31,889,923
- Population Density (2007): persons per sq km 42.0.
- Life expectancy: 44.2

(World Fact Book 2008)



Figure 6 Map of Afghanistan (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2008)

### **4.1.1 Climate:**

The climate in Afghanistan is generally dry or semi-dry with cold winters and dry, hot summers. The climate changes from region to region. Northern regions tend to have sub-arctic weather, whereas the east and southern regions have monsoon effects such as that of the neighboring country, Pakistan. Kabul and its neighboring areas have dry weather, cold in winter and hot in summer, the same goes for the western and northwest areas. (World Fact Book 2008)

### ***4.2 Historical and Political Background:***

Listed below is a short historical and political biography of events in Afghanistan. Each of these events has a specific place in Afghan culture and each one has brought with itself something unique to the society and culture.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events</b>
600 BC	Zoroastrianism is introduced in Bactria (Balkh)
522 BC	Darius the Great expands the Achaemenid empire to Afghanistan
330 BC	Arianna (Afghanistan) is conquered by Alexander the Great
256-130 BC	Graeco-Bactrian state is established
400 AD	Afghanistan is invaded by White Huns
652 AD	Region conquered and Islam is introduced by Arabs
900-1100 AD	Ghaznavid Dynasty
1220 AD	Invasion of Genghis Khan and establishment of Mongol rule
1370-1404 AD	Tamerlane rules
1600 AD	Safavids and Uzbeks invade the country
1747	Ahmad Shah Durrani/Abdali, or Durri-I-Dauran ("Pearl of the Age"), selected as ruler of the Afghan tribes. Under his rule the country expanded, changes the name of the country from Khurasan to Afghanistan in 1750
1818	Collapse of empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani and start of civil war



1826	Dost Muhammad Khan takes control of the country
1834	The Sikhs take the control of Peshawar from Afghans
1838-1842	First Anglo-Afghan War
1842	January Anglo-Indian forces are killed and Brits are forced to leave the country
1855	Peace treaty signed by Dost Muhammad and the British Indian government
1865	Russia takes Bukhara, Tashkent, and Samarkand
1878	Second Anglo- Afghan War
1879	British takes control Kurram, Khyber, Michni, Pishin, and Sibi and Afghans lose these land permanently
1880	Afghan territories, including the Khyber Pass, relinquish to British by Abd-ar-Rahman Khan
1893	Durrand line is fixed between Afghanistan and British India, dividing tribes between Afghanistan and British India (currently known as Pakistan)
1919	War declared on Britain by Amanullah Khan, Afghanistan gets its independence
1921	Third Anglo-Afghan
1926	Amanullah Khan is made king (Ghubar, 1967, p32-836)
1939	Zahir Shah declares Afghanistan as neutral during WW2 (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1946	Afghanistan admitted as a member of the United Nations (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1973	King Zahir's kingdom is overthrown by his cousin Muhammad Daud and he declares Afghanistan a republic (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1978	Daud is killed in coup d'état. Programme of 'scientific socialism' initiated by new puppet presidents, Taraki and Amin. People resist the new government (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1979	Afghanistan is invaded by Soviet Union, and Babrak Karmal is installed as President. Mujahedeen resist the occupation of the Soviet forces and the communist government late 1970s and through 1980s. (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)

1989	Soviet troops withdraw, civil war continues (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1990	Civil War causes an increase of Islamic influence in the area (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1996	Strict Islamic regime is established in Kabul in 1996 by the Taliban (fundamentalist Islamic militia) (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
1998	US launches missile attacks on Afghanistan (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)
2001	<p>March-- Taliban destroys ancient historical sculptures in the Kabul Museum, historical sites in Ghazni, and blow up the giant Bamiyan Buddha statues.</p> <p>September 09, 2001: Ahmad Shah Massoud is killed.</p> <p>Following the September 11 terrorist attack on US, the United States and UK working with Afghan forces initiate air strikes against the Taliban which leads to the collapse of Taliban.</p> <p>December 2-5, 2002, Bonn Agreement was made where Hamid Karzai was chosen as the Chairman of the Interim Administration and all Afghan political parties agreed to work together to form a government. (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2001)</p>
2002	After a six-month interim government, Loya Jirga elects Hamid Karzai as President of a Transitional Government. (Afghan Web)
2003	War against Al Qaeda and the Taliban continue (Afghan Web)
2004	<p>Afghanistan adopts a new constitution and calls itself as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.</p> <p>October/November, presidential elections are held after being delayed twice. Hamid Karzai becomes the president.</p> <p>.....Reference to Parliamentary elections ..... ( Afghan Web)</p>
2005-Now	Afghans have been witnessing numerous achievements in different areas of reconstruction and development: however, war

against Taliban continues and suicide-bombing is becoming a national treat. (Afghan Web)

Winters snow after many years, making it hard on the refugees who live in the camps. (Afghan Web)

Afghanistan as a country has experienced many different kinds of governments through the last century such as monarchy, republic, capitalism, theocracy, dictatorship, socialism and a pro-communist state. (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2007, p.7.)

The new constitution was adopted January 2004. The new constitution requires the country to have three branches of government; executive, legislative and judiciary. (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2007, p.7.)

Executive branch is governed by the chief of state which is the president, Hamid Karzai. The president and his vice presidents are elected through direct votes of people for a five-year term. (Encyclopedia Encarta, 2007, p.8.)

Legislative branch is also called bicameral National Assembly consisting of House of the People with 249 seats, and House of the Elders with 102 seats. The House of People's members are elected directly for a period of five years. The first part of the House of Elders (34 seats) is elected by provincial council for a period of four years, the second section (34 seats) of the House of Elders are appointed through distract council for a period of three years and the third part (34 seats) is elected by the president for a period of five years. (Library of Congress, May 2006, p.14)

Judicial branch consists of Supreme Court, High Courts, and Appeals Courts. The constitution of 2004 predetermined that the Supreme Court include nine judges who would be appointed by the president, with approval of the People's Council, for a 10-year term. (Library of Congress, May 2006, p.14)

### ***4.3 Economy:***

GDP:	\$35 billion (2007 EST.)
GDP Ranking:	100 <sup>th</sup>

GDP per capita:	\$1,000 (2007 EST.)
GDP per capita Ranking:	206 <sup>th</sup>
Exports:	opium, fruits and nuts, hand-woven carpets, wool, cotton, hides and pelts, precious and semi-precious gems
Imports:	capital goods, food, textiles, petroleum products
Main Trading Partners:	Pakistan, India, US, UK, Germany, Japan and Finland (CIA, the World Fact Book 2008)

Afghanistan's economy depends on agriculture. This industry, like the country, has suffered from continuous wars throughout the last three decades. Around 80% of the workforce is in the agricultural sector and 38% of the GDP comes from this sector. The agricultural sector is vulnerable to the changes of weather making the dry seasons harsh on the industry. (DATAMONITOR, Country Profile, June 2007)

The service industry is growing as the foreign aids are coming in to the country and there has been more investment in this sector. Due to consistent decline in the agricultural sector, the GDP has fluctuated between 2003 and 2006 from 26.9% to 3.5%. (DATAMONITOR, Country Profile, June 2007)

The service sector adds 38% to GDP and industrial sector earns 24% of the GDP. Unemployment remains high at 41%; however, the consumer prices which were high between 2003 and 2005, subsided in 2006 due to the decline in housing rents. (DATAMONITOR, Country Profile, June 2007)

#### **4.3.1 Working Hours and Public Holidays:**

**Public holidays:** Friday or Jumu'ah, Eid ul-Fitr (celebration after Ramadan, it varies from year to year as it is celebrated according the lunar calendar), Eid ul-Adha (celebration after the pilgrimage, celebration day varies), Ashura (the day grandchildren of Prophet Muhammad PBUH were killed, celebration day varies),

MAWLEED AL-NABI (birth of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, celebration day varies), New Year Day (21<sup>st</sup> of March), Victory Day (28<sup>th</sup> of April), and Independence Day (19<sup>th</sup> of August)

**Working hours:** (Governmental offices close mid-day Thursday in all most all seasons)

Spring: Saturday through Thursday, from 8 am to 4 pm

Summer: Saturday through Thursday, from 7.30 am to 3.30 pm

Fall: Saturday through Thursday, from 8 am to 4 pm

Winter: Saturday through Thursday, from 8 am to 4 pm

#### ***4.4 Culture:***

As we discussed at the beginning of the study, there is little to no information available which would give us a general view of what Afghan culture is like. The civil wars and the wars with the invaders, have given most of the world the idea that Afghans have a fighting culture, they are intolerant and aggressive.

The assumption might be true in some aspects of life, but it definitely misleads the thoughts from reality. The past three decades have created a different culture in Afghanistan which we could call transitional culture; it is the dominated culture at the time being, but it will change as conditions get better inside the country.

There is more to Afghans than their courage to fight for their independence time and again. Afghanistan is a culturally diverse country as it is a combination of many ethnic groups. This factor gives the country a unique plural culture which is made up of different cultures and comes from different roots.

In this study we try to find out the common factors among Afghans which will help the tourists, businessmen and foreigners as a whole understand the people and the society better.

Here we try to share how they as Afghans evaluate themselves against the Lewis Model. Gathered observations of a group of Afghans (males and females between the

ages of 18-40) who have experience of working and being in the company of Afghans will be discussed in detail under their respective categories.

#### **4.4.1 Languages:**

There are more than 30 languages spoken in Afghanistan. There are two official languages, Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashtu. Dari is language of 50% of population and Pashtu is spoken by 35% of Afghans. Turkic languages, mainly Turkmen and Uzbek are spoken by 11% of the people. There are other small minorities with their own language such as Balochi and Pashai. Most of the Afghan people are bilingual. (The World Fact Book 2008)

#### **4.4.2 Religion:**

Islam is the dominant religion of the country with 99% of the population adhering to it. The other 1% of the population consists of small sects such as Sikhs, Hindus and Jews (all the Jews left Afghanistan by the year 2000). (Library of Congress May 2006, p.6.)

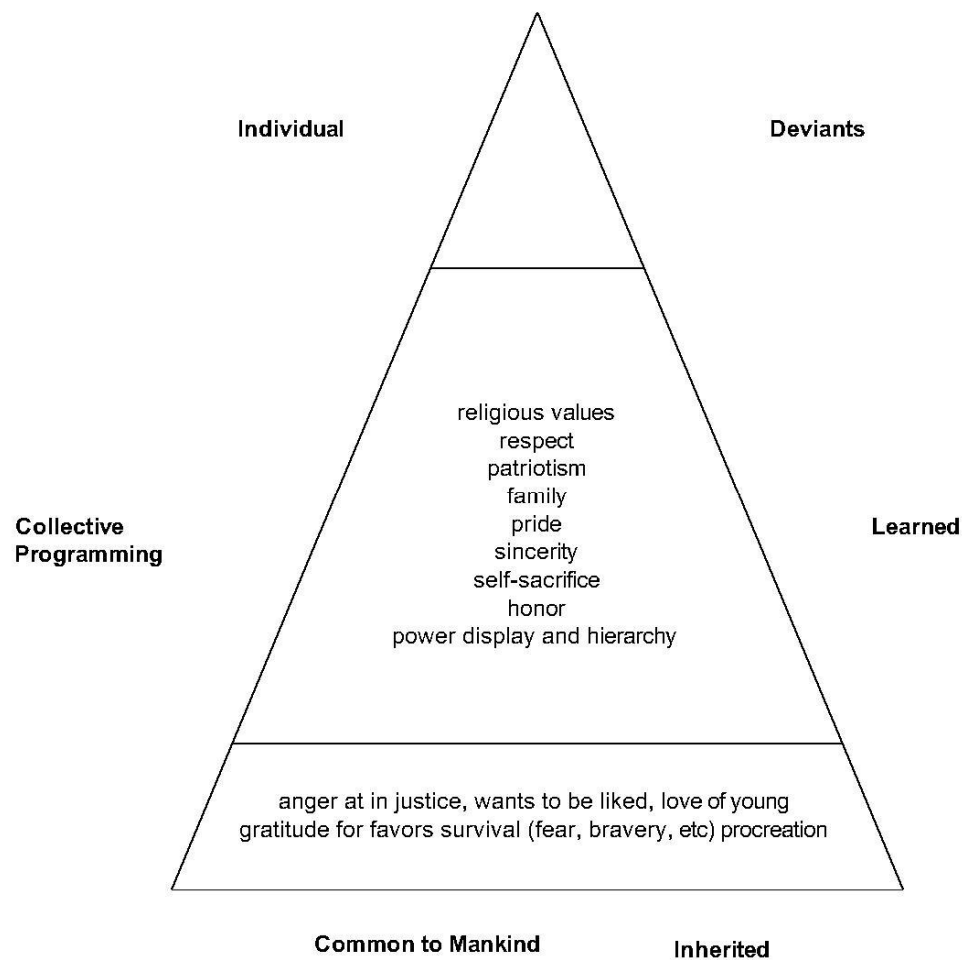
Religion governs most part of an Afghan's life, including everyday dealings, business transactions, political conditions, and legal affairs. State is not separate from religion, though freedom of religion exists.

#### **4.4.3 Values and Core Beliefs:**

Before we start identifying common cultural factors between Afghans, we want to list some of the beliefs and values which are important among Afghans:

- Belief in Creator of the heavens and the earth, one God, Allah (Who is accepted as the God of all human kind)
- Islamic and religious values
- Respect and love for prophets such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad  
Peace Be Upon Them All

- Respect of the holy book, Quran
- Respect of elders
- Love of the country
- Devotion to ones family
- Extended families
- Loyalty to ones roots
- Pride in the history of the country
- Pride in ones status and rank
- Pride in achievements
- Unlimited hospitality
- Sympathy with the needy
- Keeness on education (mostly for boys, though nowadays there is more females in the educational institute than males)
- Male dominance in the society ( since the start of new government, from 2001 up to now, women are gaining higher position in the society and males counterparts are losing their authority over them.)
- Sincerity
- Self-sacrifice
- Concerns over honor
- Concerns over mistakes
- Politeness and discipline
- Respect for women
- Protection of women
- Protection of the weak
- Bound by rules and regulations of the society
- Power display and hierarchy
- Role of a person as an individual as well as the member of a family and society



**Figure 7: Afghan Values and Core Beliefs (Modified from Richard Lewis book 2007, p.18)**

Afghans will avoid a situation where they will lose face and that is why they will avoid confrontations most of the time. They will also try to protect someone else's face and not make him or her shameful in front of others.

They generally avoid arguments in working life as it does not show professionalism, however, in a confrontation; emotion holds more weight than logic.

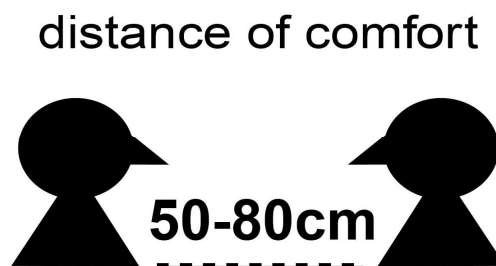
#### **4.4 Cultural Black Holes:**

The Afghan cultural black hole is related to its history and heritage. Afghans are Aryans and Arianna's heart was based in Afghanistan in the city called Balkh, previously known as Bukhdi or Bactra.



#### **4.4.5 Concept of Space:**

Afghans are comfortable working in a small space with other people. They feel they are being appreciated and liked if the space between them and their colleagues and acquaintances and friends are less; if you try to create more space between them and yourself, they will think you dislike them or there is something wrong with them.

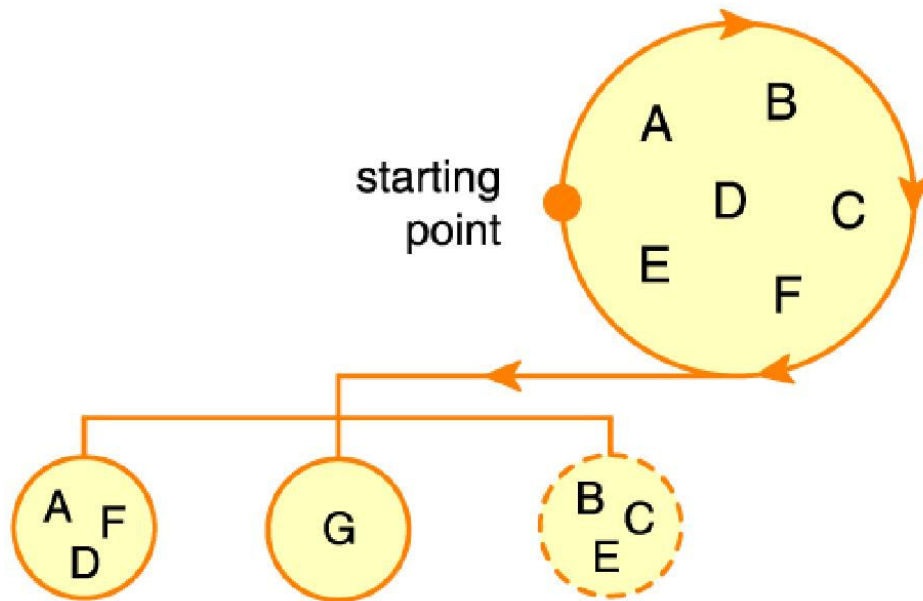


**Figure 8 Distance of Comfort for Afghans (CultureActive website 2008)**

As for the national space, they prefer to stay away from the neighboring countries and their nationals. They like their independence and any country trying to take control of Afghanistan will face a strong resistance.

#### **4.4.6 Concept of Time:**

When it is time to work and take care of official work, Afghans are very punctual and they try to take care of things and in business transactions, they try to follow a timetable and see how it fits their partner. However, they do not do the same with their home and social life. They do not follow any timelines; time is free, use it as it fits; the general attitude. They are supposed to visit a friend at 10 am they go to their house 12 pm and instead of spending two hours talking and discussion thing, they spend four hours and by the time they decide to come home they are still in the middle of a conversation.



**Figure 9 Concept of Time in Afghan Society (CultureActive website 2008)**

Afghans generally act to whatever is happening at the time being and work with it and take care of it; however, they also do several things at one time. If they are working, it will not stop then from calling a friend and asking about their health or taking care of some personal matter.

Long unnecessary phone calls are becoming a norm in the work place especially when one is working in governmental jobs.

They like to multi-task; take care of their family business, talk to friends and do their job. They want to visit their friends and relatives during weekdays; they do shopping during weekdays as well as do their work. They do not have to have a plan to complete a task as long as they know what their job is and what is expected of them.

There are some Afghans who are very conscious that working hour and private time should not be mixed, and they usually are the ones who are trusted by the CEO, chairman/owner/ head of the company or organization.

#### 4.4.7 Self Image:

Afghans see themselves as brave and courageous. They feel they are obliged to defend the weak and fight with the oppressor. It is necessary to respect the old and show kindness to the young. Respect is demanded of youngsters and kindness is of elders. Though the old can be excused of showing kindness towards others but same is not true of younger ones.

Politeness and courtesy show the high position of a family and the way one has been brought up. People look up to those who have the highest morals in the society.

### 4.5 Cultural Factors in Communication

#### 4.5.1 Communication Patterns

Afghans like to express their opinions and they want to share their experiences with others. Productive conversation and talks with purpose are more appreciated among the educated and working community. Wisdom in words is valued among the experienced and elderly.

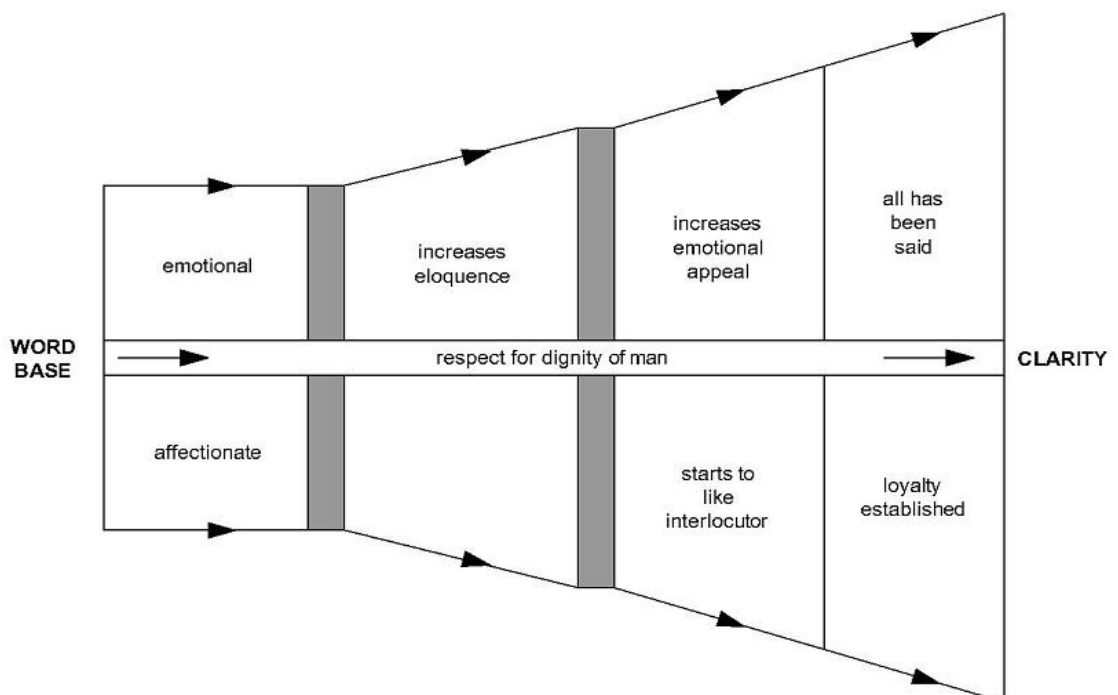


Figure 10: Communication Patterns (Modified from Lewis 2007, p.70)

They talk more when they have a message to convey yet they do not burst out and tell it straight away; that is considered rude. They want to talk when they want to emphasize on their ideas. Those who talk too much are not respected and they are called empty pots; wisdom lies in silence (proverb).

While conversing they try to be polite and also get their point to the other side indirectly. The idea is not that they are cowards but they do not sound rude or insensitive and unemotional. They try to relate to the condition of someone else and they try to put themselves in someone else's shoes.

Afghans, like their neighboring countries, are extrovert. The tone of their voice tells the other person what they think (if the other party understands the language); a loud voice does not necessarily mean that they are angry, they might just want to emphasize on a point.

Before they announce news about someone/something, they try to see if it is going to affect someone's feeling. How could they make it so that its impact will not be that huge which will destroy someone or someone's life? As a poet says, earn the hearts because that is the best pilgrimage, as one heart is better than a thousand Ka'abah (place of pilgrimage for Muslims). If the truth hurts and causes a problem (conflicts, hurt someone's feelings) then a lie would be preferred.

They are ruled by emotions and they make decisions with emotions. Beauty is appreciated and acting eloquent shows modesty, character and knowledge. They get emotional about different topics; be an Afghan nationalist or not, when someone tries to discredit the country, they get defensive and would get offended. Seeing someone mistreating women or a weak person, they get upset and they defend the person.

#### **4.5.2 Body Language and Non-verbal Communication**

Afghans like to communicate more verbally. Though there is exception to the rule; many people still rely on non-verbal communication as they think words do not have as much impact as other forms of non-verbal communication.

Hand usage is common especially when the topic of the discussion is important or when the person shows frustration. Facial expression can tell you what your Afghan counterpart means, in particular if you do not speak the language.

Eye contact is important, it shows that you are interested in what is being said and you respect the person. Need to remember there is a difference between staring and keeping eye contact; later is appreciated while the former is disliked.

Among Afghans there are people who have unlimited body language usage and it seems like it has become a norm nowadays. In the 'old days' 20 years ago, usage of body language was subtle.

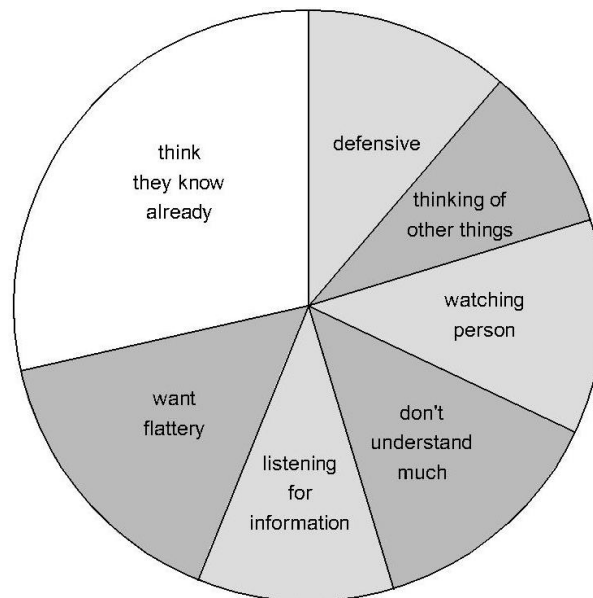
### **4.5.3 Listening Habits**

While listening an Afghan has already made his/her mind up that he/she knows the topic well enough to give feedback while the speakers in the middle of the conversation.

Afghans may pay more attention to the presenter individually than in a team. When there is more than one Afghan present, they create their own group and start their topic.

Afghans pay attention to the information presented in the meeting, which will be considered important for their personal as well as professional life.

Afghans do not like to be interrupted and they do not want to interrupt. It is not considered polite to interrupt a conversation; however, there is a system of feedback. You talk, after your sentence finishes, I will start talking. This is how the major part of the working life goes, though we should not forget that due to the recent immigrations to the neighboring countries, the newer generation has taken new habits.



**Figure 11: Listening Pattern (Modified from Lewis 2007, p.71)**

Interrupting a conversation among the younger generation does not mean you are being rude or disrespectful, it just shows that you are listening and you are voicing your opinion. It is a new form of interaction.

#### **4.5.4 Audience Expectations at Presentations**

- expect exploitation
- expect arrogance
- cover suspicion with politeness
- show friendliness
- observe explicit body language
- have strong eye contact
- show respect

## ***4.6 Interaction***

### **4.6.1 Concept of Status**

Afghans relate status to one's family, wealth, age and power. One's connections to the government would give him/her a high status in the society. The status in among Afghans is ascribed not achieved (concept taken from Trompenaars and Turner, 102). However, due to the changes in the country over the past three decades, people are slowly becoming familiar with the achievement-oriented culture.

Afghans are family oriented and very loyal to them. There is high hierarchy between members of the family, members of society and in the working environment there is a big gap in the hierarchy.

Being loyal to your roots, family, tribe, your workplace, does not show your weakness, but rather it shows that you can be trusted and counted on.

As Afghanistan was known as the land of Aryans (the noble; the honorable), people of the country take pride in their 7000 year-old rich history and heritage.

As mentioned earlier, the geographical location of the country has made it a hot-spot for many emperors who wanted to expand their kingdom. For the specific reason, all through history Afghans have fought for their freedom and independence. They take pride in their courage and in their patriotism.

Afghanistan has been a land which has nurtured famous scholars such as Abu Ali Seena Balkhi (Avicenna), and Maulana Jalaluddeen Muhammad Balkhi (Rumi). People of Afghanistan believe that one day Afghans will get back their important position that they once had as an important part of Silk Road.

Women in their old age have great status; however, younger women do not possess the same position. There is need to mention that educated women demand the same status as their male counterparts might have.

#### **4.6.2 Gender Issues**

Females are considered physically weak in Afghan society and she must be protected and a more preferable place for her is the home, while the man is considered strong and is the bread-winner. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)

Afghan society is generally a male-dominated society; however the role is changing as more women are joining in the work force and are becoming more independent of their male relatives.

One must not forget that only the women in big cities are privileged to acquire education and know their basic rights. Women, who live in small cities and villages, still follow old traditions and do not know anything else except what they are told by the males in their societies.

There is no free mixing between genders at work or educational institutions, only within relatives and families. However, educational places such as universities and colleges are co-educational; the mixing is limited to a needs basis only. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions 2008.)

In work places, females and males work together. Their relationship is strictly work-related and the genders must honor and respect each other. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions 2008.)

A male who shows his emotions shows weakness in him. Female Afghans are more emotional than their male counterparts and this trend goes to the working and social life.

Female and male do not show affections to each other in public even if they are husband and wife.

Your host's wife may not sit with you at the same dinner table. It varies from family to family; those with a western lifestyle will have mixed dining tables while the rest of



Afghans prefer for men and women to have separate dining table and most preferably in different rooms.

Physical contact between the two genders does not exist. Males should not attempt to shake hands with females.

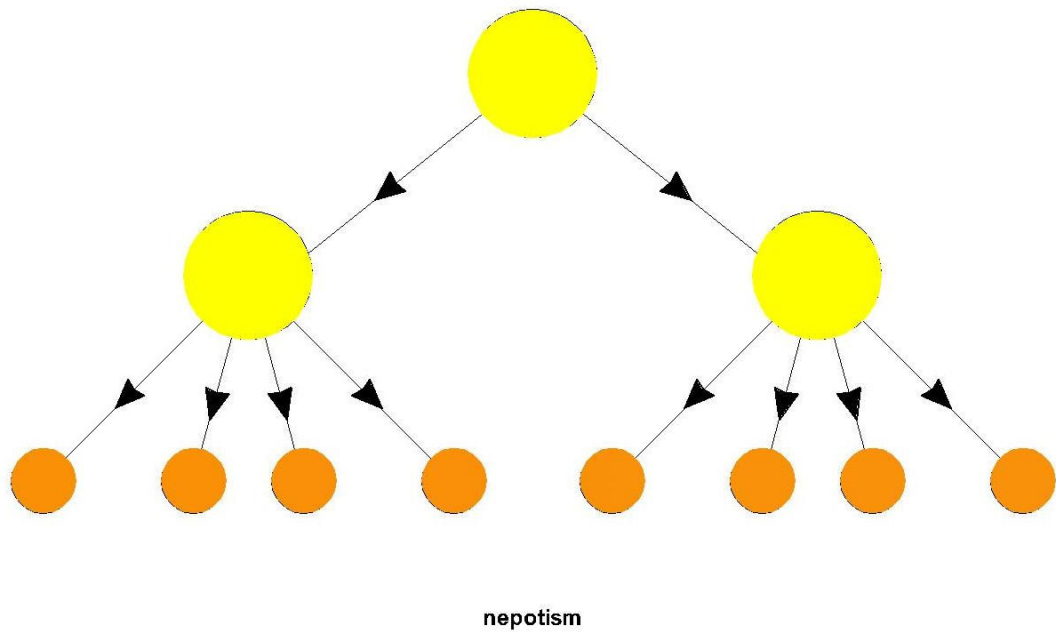
If a man speaks to a woman in public it is considered inappropriate and not honorable. Women should never look at any men. She should always keep her head down when she is walking. Women should wear loose fitting and covered garments if do not want unnecessary attention. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions 2008.)

Man should always show respect to the woman; a man who does not respect a woman is thought to have no manners.

#### **4.6.3 Leadership Style**

As Afghanistan is a collectivist society, they live collectively and gather their relatives and friends around themselves in the work place. Therefore, nepotism is common in almost all Afghan businesses.

Leaders are expected to solve the problems, and to know the answer to each and every question. A leader must possess a strong personality to withstand the pressure which comes with job.



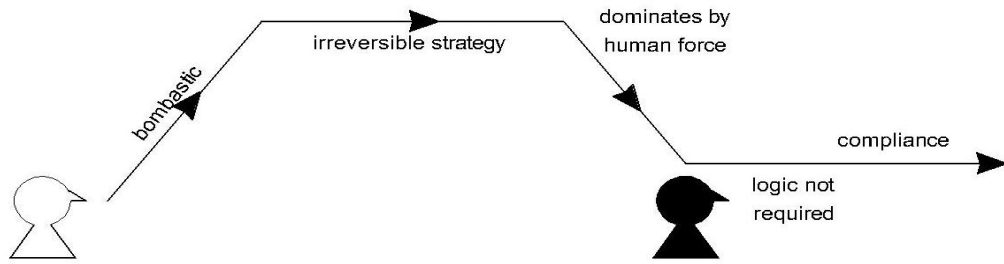
**Figure 12 Leadership Style (Modified from Lewis 2007, p.108)**

#### **4.6.4 Language of Management**

As mentioned earlier, there are some 30 languages spoken in Afghanistan, two of which are considered official languages of the country; Dari and Pashtu. Dari is a little bit softer and is understood by the majority of the people of the country, therefore, most of the managers communicate in Dari with their subordinates.

Orders are rhetorical and emphasis is put on the subject which is discussed by the boss, and the opinions of a leader are irreversible.

Having a rich language makes it easier for managers/leaders to express their feelings, emotions and thoughts freely which would influence, entice and flatter the subordinates. (Lewis, 2007, p.79)



**Figure 13: Language of Management (Modified from Lewis 2007, p.78)**

#### **4.6.5 General Behavior at Meetings**

- There is no exact starting time for a meeting, it is flexible.
- Handshake is a common way of greeting, but handshake with the opposite sex should be avoided. Instead a male would place his hand on his chest and nod slightly to the female counterpart as greeting. It is considered polite to nod slightly while you shake hands with a senior person. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)
- It is considered thoughtful to start off by asking questions about the other person's health, family etc.
- Keeping eye-contact is important especially if you want to emphasis on the matter at hand and you want to establish trust and authority. Avoid eye-contact with the opposite sex. Eye contact should not be turned into staring, it is considered rude and impolite, best way to keep eye contact is to look at someone's eyes now and then. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)
- Before you go to a meeting, you should know your counterpart and establish trust or else start the first meeting as the starting point to get to know the person. Trust is more important than making deals.
- Meetings are held to announce the decisions and give information not to make decision or brainstorm. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)
- As mentioned earlier, Afghans do not like talking directly about a topic or voicing their opinion. Therefore, it is important that you pay attention to the body language and read between the lines to get an answer to your question. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)

- Afghans have a shame and honor based culture, communicate in a way which would not place blame on someone or talk down to them. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)

#### **4.6.6 Negotiating Characteristics**

Afghans are hard bargainers, they see deals as win-lose situations. Try to show that you are planning to bring the best. The harder you bargain, the more it shows how valuable your product/business is. Do not sell yourself too easily and too cheap, fight for what you think you deserve.

Do not give up in bargaining, you might be surprised to find out that Afghans will buy something from you with a good price.

The person you make deals with should be a senior of the company or the key position holder. Contracts and deals are made by high level managers, unless your deal is related to someone in the low part of hierarchy and he/she has the right to make decision. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)

Always show that making deals with you will bring the Afghan party monetary benefits as well as respect and honor. Remind them of their fairness and justice and let them know you want to build a strong relationship with them (business wise).

If you are not satisfied with the deal they present you, you can walk away. If they follow you, you will get something which will satisfy you. If they do not follow you, they have not been interested to do business from the beginning.

Always show your kindness and your sense of justice. Do not try to cause loss of face. (Kwintessential, Cross Cultural Solutions, 2008.)

#### **4.6.7 Contracts and Commitments**

Words are not lightly taken. A contract is a contract when it is pronounced by mouth and it becomes finalized in writing. Though oral contracts are not kept as much today

as it used to be. It is always advised to make contracts/statements official by writing it down and signing and backing it up by unbiased witnesses.

#### **4.6.8 Manners and Taboos**

Respectfulness is a must in Afghan society; respect others to be respected. Respect is earned, not inherited or bought, though rich people and people of power do buy respect. However, respectfulness does not stop them from being curious. They want to find out as much information about someone, or an issue, as possible. It might be annoying to foreigners, but that is how most Afghans broaden their network and gather information.

You are expected to greet the other party anytime you see them. Your business should not stop you from exchanging greetings with the Afghan counterpart. Do not act like you did not see them on the street when you were passing by them; they will get the impression that you are using them.

Afghans are not generally open to foreigners; it takes time for them to trust a foreigner. They will be loyal friends once they trust someone. Nonetheless they are always sincere when they meet new people.

When you are invited to an Afghan's house, it is preferred to take gift with you; usually packaged candy would do. The dinner time is specific; when you are told of a time do not be late. You are usually invited a couple of hours earlier than the start of the dinner. Your host will initiate that start of dinner by getting up and washing his hands (if there is washbasin near by) or they will bring a specific bowl and jug for washing hands.

While eating, you are usually offered spoon and knife. Food is eaten with spoon and knife. If you have the habit of eating with your left hand, it is ok, but it is considered respectful if you use your right hand. In case you want to impress your host, you can try eating by hand.

Do not decline when you are offered to taste some specific food; the host will think something is wrong with the food. When food is brought on the table; you are expected to try all of them. Afghans are generous and hospitable towards their guests.

If you are offered to be taken out to a restaurant, your host will most likely pay for your food as well as his. However, out of respect offer to pay, it shows that you appreciated his kindness and you are not a freeloader.

Taboos are categorized in Afghanistan; there are some things which are forbidden in religion, such as:

- No pork
- No alcohol (you may however see alcohol in houses of some people who are not religious)
- Dogs are not allowed inside the house. A cat is allowed inside the house.
- No statue or sculpture in the house which would resemble the living being.
- Sleeping with your feet towards the Qibla (the direction to which Muslims pray)
- Fornication and adultery etc

There are some general taboos which are related to history of the country and general culture; some examples are:

- Discussing female relatives
- Raising your voice in front of an older person
- Do not start eating unless the older person has started.
- Do not ask your guest what they want to eat, offer them the best that you have.
- Do not sit down unless the older person has sat down already
- Do not shake the hand on an older person with one hand; hold his hand with your left hand and then shake the hand with right hand
- Female proposing to male for marriage
- Do not allow a baby to look at herself/himself in the mirror, he/she will get sick
- Do not wear new clothes on Wednesdays, cause it will burn

#### ***4.7 Motivation Factors***

- Show respect to your Afghan partner as he/she respects you, anything less than that is regarded as disrespectful.
- Afghans like to “know you better” so do not get offended if they ask you personal questions.
- Be warm and welcoming towards them, they do not like cold and rigid people and they will avoid you if they feel you are cold towards them.
- Do not praise the countries which have attacked Afghanistan. They feel you are taking sides with the enemy
- You should expect to be waiting for an hour before you can meet the person you have an appointment with.
- Do not be surprised if you see an Afghan seeking favors. They depend on the relationships they have in the business world and count on them and they try to find any possible means to manage affairs without going to official channels.
- Show that you trust them but be cautious. Society is changing rapidly and there might be some people who are after your money.
- Be aware of bribery; it has become very common in recent years. Always have some extra figures in your budget, but you must inform the counterpart that your company and country forbids bribery. (It is important to mention that Islam forbids bribery in all forms. Afghans due to low pays have become accustomed to bribery. This way they earn their livings; however, higher officials in governmental agencies earn not just their living but also their extravagant life style through bribery.)
- Give them time to make decision. A common saying among Afghans is: haste is devil’s job. Meaning when you hurry, you usually make wrong decisions.
- While doing business amongst Afghans, gather as many references as you can. You can always go back to them next time around. Another reason for taking someone’s information is that everyone knows everyone else in the country, therefore, you can test who is worthy of keeping in your contact list and who is not.

- Have patience and show patience when dealing with a collectivist culture as they might take their time in negotiations. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 67)
- Affective and emotional people may create a scene when they do not like the way an offer looks, so take a deep breath and make your decision with a clear mind. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 79)
- They might show enthusiasm but it does not mean they have decided and agree with you. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 79)
- The person whom they are negotiating with is more important than the deal being made (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 79); as they want a long term relationship more than a short term project.
- Since the country has an ascription-culture, it is advised that your negotiation team has enough senior, older and formal position holders in order to impress your counterpart. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 118-119)
- Respect them even if you think they are not educated enough. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 118-119)
- Always tell your title which represents your position in your company, so the Afghan company/organization with whom you are doing business knows your status. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 118-119)
- Show respect according to someone's position and age (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 118-119)
- Emphasize on the history, traditions and rich culture of the people and relate how they would make a good contribution to your project/business and how they would have great potentials. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 139)
- Have future plans ready and agree on meetings for future, but do not set an exact date and time. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 139)
- Do not give-up easily, have patience and persistence and politeness; you will get a good result. Relationships are hard to build; therefore, it is wise to maintain them. (Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner, 2007, 155)



#### ***4.8 How to Empathize With Afghans***

- Show interest in your Afghan partner more than his company or business
- Always ask about him, his family and male relatives
- Offer to help, frugally or emotionally, with their business and family problems (if they share their problems with you).
- Socialize with them and create relationships with them, this will earn you their trust
- Learn their taboos and manners and follow them as much as possible; you will look sincere to the eyes of an Afghan
- Show that you are educated, but do not outsmart them
- Always be interested in whatever they say and share of their personal life
- Confide in them and share with them details of personal life as much as you feel comfortable with.
- Be as communicative as they are.
- Follow their example in the way they represent themselves, talk and have physical distance.
- Charm them with your character.
- Do not criticize them directly; it is not taken very well.
- Find out about their allies and gather information about them; it makes a good subject of conversation.
- Show compassion to the poor and needy and be fair in your dealings with those who are misfortunate.
- A lie with good purpose is better than a troublesome truth. You are advised not to tell the truth when it hurts someone.

## **5 SPECIAL NOTES:**

### **Working Environment:**

In the workplace, Afghans connect with all departments and try to create a web of acquaintances all over the station. They take care of human transaction before they take care of business.

Do unto others as you would want them do unto you; help others so when you need help, they can lend you a hand. When they delegate their power, they delegate to their family members or close friends.

Plans are only for others; they have survived and done well without one for centuries so why bother; that is the general attitude towards planning. They plan on the spot, because plans may change; therefore it is waste of time to even make one before a meeting. However sometimes plans are inevitable, they are required to make so they make it and they try to stick with it.

The working environment has many challenges. Most Afghans who are working, either like their job or they simply do not have any choice but to work where they are employed. Therefore, many would like to have flexible working hours. The majority would like to work any hours, as long as they earn a decent living from it.

### **Social Life:**

Their social life revolves around their family, friends and acquaintances. They enjoy the company of others. Many think of the social gathering as an opportunity to expand their network of friends and acquaintance as well as a golden chance to learn something new and show their learned skills.

First they are obliged to their family, then to immediate relatives and to their tribe and friends and 'the hands that feed us'. They have obligation to keep their ties with their

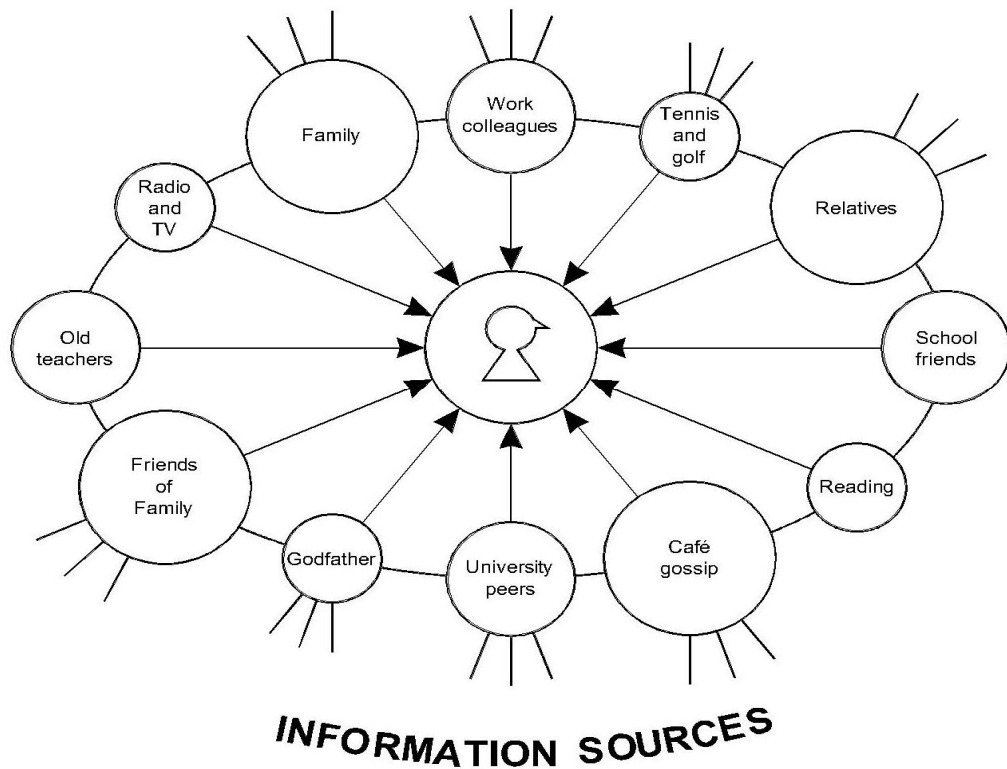
family and friends. They are obliged to keep secrets of 'the family'. Your relatives are your own and strangers are strangers.

The hand of God is with community; therefore, they live collectively. Their families consist of many members and children stay with the parents for as long as parents are alive and also grandparents. They take care of their old and have them live with the 'male' child and his family as long as the parent lives. Children live off their parents as long as they are studying and jobless and help with the expenses when they have jobs and children do the same with their parents when they are old and retired.

A man is known by the company he keeps. That is very much true among Afghans; therefore, Afghans try to create friendship with everyone that 'looks' trustworthy and is worthy of friendship and they want to have many acquaintances. The more people you know, the higher your chances of getting a better position in the society and the better the chances of advancement for your business.

They try not to get trapped in a web. They do not like that their judgment, work, ethics or power be questioned. If they come under question and they do not have any answer, they always have good excuses to give; though none of the 'my grandmother passed away' excuses because they are a tied culture, if someone's grandmother is dead, for certain his/her boss will come to the funeral and he/she would need to fake a funeral.

Due to continuous wars and the problems faced everyday in refugee camps and inside the country, the majority of Afghans are impatient. Nonetheless, very many are still patient and they provide support to those who lose their temper easily.



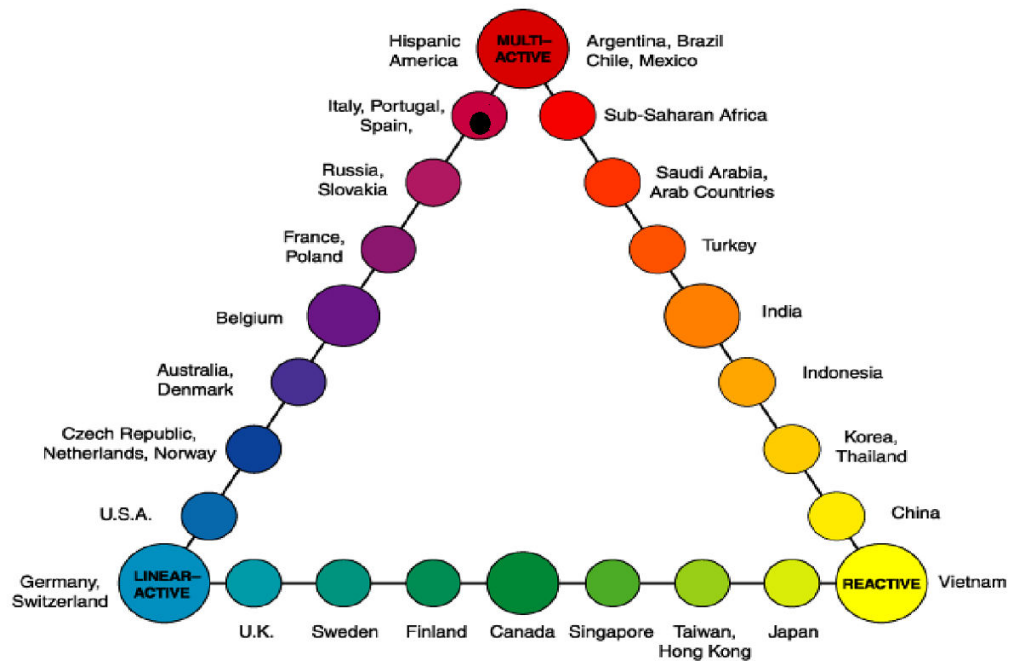
**Figure 14: Information Sources (Lewis 2007, p.51)**

Reality is what appears to the eyes and facts are what they know. However, facts could be influenced by other factors, such as what a close relative says might change how they look at the subject. Information is trustworthy to an Afghan when it comes from a person especially from a close friends and relatives. Books are trusted when it is not written by some other tribe. They only trust those who work for people; aka their own tribe/group they belong to or their relatives or a colleague.

Intuitions are trusted and they are acted upon. Instincts are called sixth sense; modern day people do not trust the 'gut' feelings, do not like 'superstitious' ideas. There is clash of ideas between the younger generation and the older generation and the older generation usually wins because the old is to be respected even if they are wrong.

## 6 CULTURAL CLASSIFICATIONS:

From everything we have learned so far we can classify Afghans as dialog-oriented and eloquent and call them multi-actives.



**Figure 15: Afghan Culture in Lewis Model (CultureActive website 2008 with some modification)**

*While the above are true with most of the Afghans, the new generation of Afghans has started to have a new approach to social and political life as well as to their working environments. Furthermore, the new generation of Afghans who have had the experience of living in other societies, are more open, in terms of sharing their ideas and thoughts with others, and more restricted, in terms of following the procedures. (M.Hassan Soroosh 2007)*

## 7 CONCLUSIONS:

From a culture driven business perspective we can see why Afghans are leaning more towards a multi-active category on the Lewis model. They take pride in their history and nationality. They place high priority on their families, relatives and roots and

loyalty to them. They keep their honor and they are concerned over their integrity and they try to save face and do not cause others to lose face.

They are kind to the young and respectful towards their elders. Showing sympathy to the needy and lending a helping hand are signs of generosity and kindness among Afghans.

Relationships are more vital than any contract and they are built upon trust. They are people who are more interested in the human side of business. Afghans are people-oriented; they enjoy social life more than working life. Spending time taking care of human-transactions is more pleasing to them than dealing with facts and figures.

They feel confident doing many things at the same time than doing things categorically or one thing at a time. They depend on their personal contacts and network of relatives and friends; they try to avoid official channels as much as possible.

The Afghan people like to express their thoughts through verbal and non-verbal communication. They express themselves better through communication and expect the same from others. They are better listener as individuals than a group. Gathering information in a society such as this happens through human factors; acquiring information first hand.

Afghans consider the female physically weak, though it does not mean that you are allowed to disrespect her. She should be protected in all cases.

A leader is considered as someone who knows the answer to everything and solves all problems; therefore, leadership in Afghan community requires one to have a strong personality. Afghan leaders charm their subordinates with their usage of their rich language.

Meetings are considered social gathering where you exchange information and inform others of the decisions which are already made. It is good place to get to know your partner in case you have not had the chance so far.

Afghans like to bargain and expects to see same from their foreign partners. It is wise to stand one's ground and get the best deal. They most certainly take their time when they want to make a contract, so it is advisable not to hurry them. The key person must be sought while negotiating with Afghans who is usually a senior person in the company. Contracts become official when both parties have agreed and have signed it in front of witnesses.

Any entity that is interested in doing business with or within such an environment needs to take this information into consideration if they want to prosper. Only after truly understanding each other can humans learn how to interact and coexist.

## **6 DISCUSSIONS**

In this section we will talk about the process of the research and how well did it accomplish the aim of the researcher; furthermore, some of the personal experiences of the researcher will be discussed.

Culture is an important topic in the business world, though it is taken lightly by many managers. Nonetheless, it has an important impact on the way businesses are conducted. Studying in a cross-cultural program and living in a society where different cultures are appreciated, it was natural to choose the topic as a thesis project.

In regards to time management, all aspects of the thesis were measured. The theoretical part was partly completed at the same time as the empirical part; where as the last section of theoretical framework was delayed due to some personal problems and circumstances. Even though there was a gap between the first part of the theoretical framework and the second part of it, it did not affect the result of the research.

The qualitative research used in this research was only studied at the school; it was not used before by the researcher. This Bachelor's was the researcher's first work and the personal research was not used prior to this thesis for other studies.

The basis for the theoretical part was taken from the book of Mr. Richard Lewis, *When Cultures Collide*. The cultural categories from the above mentioned book was used as source of discussion among those Afghans who provided information on Afghan culture.

While gathering information it was taken into consideration that the group providing information, are Afghans and that they and / or their family members had experience working with Afghans.

The way the discussion was arranged, it was easily understood by the participants and it can be argued that the information gathered is reliable and can be used as reference in the future as a source for other research.

Since the discussions were organized over the internet, sometimes obtaining all the information from all the parties at once was difficult and obliging the researcher to contact the people more than once to collect the data.

The researcher throughout the process of conducting the thesis has stayed neutral especially when she needed to build trust and relationships and gather information from the participating parties in the discussion. Had she not been neutral, the result of the thesis would have been biased and representing her point of view more rather than the participants in the discussion.

The participants were more than willing to contribute to the research; as we can see from the results, they have been very open and honest about their views. In all cases the participants were educated and open minded and discussed their opinions freely and exhibited unbiased observations. Studying the characteristics of each participant was a window into their cultural lifestyle.

As discussed at the beginning of the research, due to the fact that the result of the research has been gathered through discussion and observation of a few people, the sample size is limited. Thus, the result of the research is limited and will not be applicable to every Afghan. Therefore, it is suggested that further study should be done on this and similar topics. It would be wise to research each topic of the culture mentioned in the country profiles on Mr. Lewis' site (CultureActive).



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