



Think Global Intercultural Awareness

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Objectives

- Understand why culture matters in business
- Learn key cultural models (Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner)
- Explore practical communication strategies
- Apply findings to teamwork, leadership, and global business relationships

Why Culture Matters in Business

Key Questions Companies Face

- **WHY** do we need to adapt globally?
 - **WHERE** are we doing business (markets, regions)?
 - **HOW** do we enter and succeed in those markets?
 - **WHAT** do we bring (products, talent, value)?
- **Why misunderstandings happen**
 - Culture shapes how we:
 - Communicate
 - Build trust
 - Make decisions
 - Solve problems
 - Work in teams
 - Manage time and conflict

“We see the same reality, but we interpret it differently.”

What Is Culture?

Use simple, human definitions:

- **Culture is like air:** invisible but everywhere (Tayeb, 1994).
- **Culture includes:** values, beliefs, habits, ways of working, traditions (UNESCO, Encyclopedia Britannica).
- **Schein's 3 Levels of Culture**
- **Artifacts:** visible behaviours, dress, office layout
- **Beliefs & values:** strategies, priorities, “how we work here”
- **Underlying assumptions:** unconscious expectations that drive behaviour
- *Activity (5 min):*
Participants identify one example from each level in their own workplace.

Key Elements of Culture

- Language
- Communication style
- Religion
- Values & attitudes
- Social structure

These shape behaviour in meetings, negotiations, and teamwork.

High-Context vs Low-Context Communication (Hall's Theory)

Low-Context Cultures (US, Germany, Scandinavia, UK)

- Direct, explicit messages
- Words = meaning
- Value clarity, logic, punctuality
- “Say what you mean”

High-Context Cultures (China, Japan, Vietnam, Arab countries, Italy)

- Indirect, layered messages
- Reading context and relationships is essential
- Non-verbal signals matter
- Flexible time, relationship-first

High-Context vs Low-Context Communication (Hall's Theory)

Practical Implications:

- Emails vs in-person conversations
- Negotiation styles
- Giving feedback
- Understanding silence

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

1. Individualism vs Collectivism

- *Individualist cultures*: independence, personal achievement (US, UK, Netherlands, Australia)
- *Collectivist cultures*: group harmony, loyalty, shared responsibility (China, Singapore, Pakistan, Mexico)

In business:

- Individual rewards vs team bonuses
- Personal initiative vs group consensus

2. Power Distance (Large vs Small)

- *Large power distance*: clear hierarchy, respect for authority (Philippines, Mexico, China, Japan)
- *Small power distance*: flat structures, approachable managers (Denmark, Austria, New Zealand)

In business:

- How employees address leaders
- Decision-making processes
- Expectations around instructions vs consultation

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

3. Uncertainty Avoidance (Weak vs Strong)

- *Weak*: flexible, adaptable, comfortable with ambiguity (Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, many Asian countries)
- *Strong*: structured, planning-driven, risk-averse (Japan, South Korea, Mediterranean, Pakistan)

In business:

- Responsiveness to change
- Preference for rules and processes

4. Masculinity vs Femininity (Goal Orientation)

- *Masculine cultures*: competition, achievement, performance
- *Feminine cultures*: quality of life, cooperation, well-being

In business:

- Work–life balance
- Conflict styles
- Reward systems

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

5. Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation

- *Long-term*: persistence, savings, strategic focus (China, Japan, Korea)
- *Short-term*: quick results, traditions, immediate outcomes (Western countries)

In business:

- How fast results are expected
- Investment behaviour

6. Indulgence vs Restraint

- *Indulgence*: allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires
- *Restraint*: societies that control gratification of needs and regulate it by means of strict social norms

In business:

- Emphasis on creativity, positive outlooks
- focus on duty, practicality

Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner Dimensions

- **Universalism vs Particularism**
 - Rules first vs relationships first
- **Individualism vs Communitarianism**
 - Person vs group focus
- **Specific vs Diffuse**
 - Clear separation between work/personal vs overlapping
- **Inner-Directed vs Outer-Directed**
 - Control environment vs adapt to environment
- **Achieved vs Ascribed Status**
 - Earned status vs role-based status
- **Sequential vs Synchronous Time**
 - One thing at a time vs multitasking and flexible time
- **Affective vs. Neutral**
 - Expressing vs. controlling emotion

Hands-on Activity:

Have participants locate their own culture on 2–3 of these scales.

Common Cross-Cultural Challenges in Teams

- Direct vs indirect communication
- hierarchy & authority expectations
- Decision-making speed
- Managing conflict
- Accents & language fluency
- Giving feedback across cultures

Strategies for Effective Intercultural Communication

- **1. Adaptation**
 - Individuals adjust their own behaviours.
- **2. Structural Intervention**
 - Reassign tasks to reduce conflict.
- **3. Managerial Intervention**
 - Leaders set shared norms and rules of engagement.
- **4. Exit**
 - If necessary, removing sources of persistent conflict.

Case Study: Guanxi in Chinese Business

- Guanxi = personal relationships & networks
- Western perceptions: slow, complex, unclear
- Future outlook: May reduce as China modernises, but culturally persistent
- **Lesson:**
Every culture has its own trust-building system

Practical Tools for Global Business

A. Communicating Across Cultures

- Use simple language
- Avoid idioms
- Confirm understanding
- Adjust directness level
- Give context when needed

B. Meetings & Negotiations

- Clarify purpose early
- Align expectations of time and hierarchy
- Invest in relationship building
- Understand that silence \neq agreement

C. Feedback Across Cultures

- Low-context cultures: direct, precise
- High-context cultures: indirect, face-saving

Small Group Task

A multicultural team must decide how to launch a new product in a foreign market.

Teams must identify:

- Where cultural clashes might arise
- Which cultural dimensions these relate to
- Strategies for overcoming them
- Debrief with whole group.

Closing

- Cultural differences are not right or wrong—just different
- Understanding others reduces friction and increases success
- Intercultural competence is a business skill, not a “soft” add-on



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