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These 8 Scales Reveal Everything You Should Know About Different Cultures

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Many people, perhaps especially Americans, underestimate how differently people do things in other countries. Examples and insights for avoiding this can be found in "The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business," a 2014 bestseller by INSEAD professor Erin Meyer (also check out those global communication diagrams from Richard Lewis).

Meyer claims you can improve relationships by considering where you and international partners fall on each of these scales:

- · Communicating: explicit vs. implicit
- Evaluating: direct negative feedback vs. indirect negative feedback
- · Persuading: deductive vs. inductive
- · Leading: egalitarian vs. hierarchical
- · Deciding: consensual vs. top down
- Trusting: task vs. relationship
- · Disagreeing: confrontational vs. avoid confrontation
- · Scheduling: structured vs. flexible

Communicating

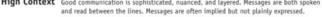
Americans are the most explicit or low-context culture there is (low-context meaning their conversation assumes relatively little intuitive understanding). This is not surprising for a young country composed of immigrants that prides itself on straighttalking.

Japan and other East Asian countries represent the other extreme.

Meyer offers strategies for negotiating these differences, but the most basic solution, as with all scales discussed in the book, is simply to be aware. Thus Americans in Japan should pay attention to what's not being said; while Japanese in America should brace themselves for direct language.

FIGURE 1.1. COMMUNICATING

	erlands Finland Germany Denmark Poland UK	Spain Italy Singapore Iran China Japan I Brazil Mexico France India Kenya Korea Argentina Russia Saudi Arabia Indonesia
Low Contes	ĸt	High Context
.ow Context	Good communication is precis	e, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and
	understood at face falue. Repr	etition is appreciated if it helps clarify the





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Building bridges of understanding and common interest among members

Evaluating

Americans may be very explicit communicators, but they are in the middle of the spectrum when it comes to giving negative feedback — as anyone who as been to an American school knows.

Israelis, Russians, and Dutch are among the most direct when it comes to negative feedback.

Japanese are among the most indirect. FIGURE 2.2. EVALUATING

Russia France Italy US UK Brazil India Saudi Arabia Japan Israel Germany Spain Australia Canada Mexico China Korea Thailand Netherlands Denmark Sweden Argentina Kenya Ghana Indonesia

Direct negative feedback

Indirect negative feedback

Persuading

Some cultures, notably the French and Italians, tend toward deductive arguments, focusing on theories and complex concepts before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. Others, notably Anglo-Saxon cultures, tend toward inductive arguments, starting with focusing first on practical application before moving to theory.

This trait shows up in everything from how people give presentations or lead meetings to how they write emails.

FIGURE 3.1. PERSUADING

Italy R France Spa	lussia Germany in	Argenti Brazil		eden Netherl Denmark	ands UK	Australia Canada	US
Latin Europ Concept-first		Latin Eu	ropean	Nordic Europ	ean	Anglo-Saxon Applicatio	n-first
Concept- first	Individuals have presenting a fact, report by building conceptual princi	statement, up a theor	or opinio etical arg	on. The prefe jument before	rence i e movie	is to begin a mess ng on to a conclu	sage or
Application- first	Individuals are tra concepts to back begin a message approached in a p are avoided in a t	up or explain or report with practical, co	in the con th an exe ncrete ma	cutive summ anner. Theore	ecessar ary or	ry. The preference bullet points. Dis	e is to cussions are
eading							

"In Denmark, it is understood that the managing director is one of the guys, just two small steps up from the janitor," a Danish

executive told Meyer. This represents one extreme in attitudes toward leadership.

On the other side of the spectrum in countries like Japan and Korea, however, the ideal boss should stand far above the workers at the top of a hierarchy.

America's outlook on leadership falls somewhere in the middle.

FIGURE 4.1. LEADING

Denmark Isra Netherlands	el Canada Finland	US	UK	Germany	France Italy	Pola	nd Russia		Japan Korea
Sweden Aus	tralia			Brazil	Mexico	Peru	Saudi	i Arabia	Nigeria
Egalitarian								Hiora	rchica
Egalitarian								Hiera	rchic
Egalitarian								Hiera	rchica
Egalitarian								Hiera	rchica
Egalitarian								Hiera	rchica
Egalitarian Egalitarian	The ideal distan								

skips hierarchical lines.

Hierarchical The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is high. The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. Status is important. Organizational structures are multi-layered and fixed. Communication follows set hierarchical lines.

Deciding

How organizations make decisions relates closely to how they view leadership, but with some important differences. Notably, while Japan has a very hierarchical leadership system, it has a very consensual decision-making system. This is the famous ringi system, which involves building consensus at a lower level before bringing a proposal to a higher level, thus enabling broad corporate consensus.

FIGURE 5.3. DECIDING

Consen	sual						Top-down
Japan	Netherlands		UK		BrazilItaly	Russia	China
Sw	eden	Germany		US	France	Inc	dia Nigeria

Trusting

In some cultures, notably America, people don't worry so much about trusting each other because they trust their legal system to enforce contracts, and so business negotiations focus on what's practical.

In others, including many emerging market economies but also to a lesser extent Western Europe, personal relationships are much more important, in part because people don't trust their legal system to enforce contracts.

FIGURE 6.1. TRUSTING

US Denmark (Netherlands Aust	Germany UK Finland tralia	Poland	France Sp	Italy ain	Mexico Bra Russia Thaili Japan Turkey	andIndia
Task-based					Relation	ship-based
Task-based	Trust is built throw built and dropped e good work consiste you.	easily, based	on the pra	cticalit	y of the situation	n. You do
Relationship- based	Trust is built throug machine. Work rela who you are at a do others well who tru	tionships bu eep level, I'v	ild up slow e shared p	ly over	the long term. I'	ve seen
isagreeing		6			41	

Some cultures embrace confrontation while others avoid it. This scale looks a lot like the scale showing the directness of negative feedback, though with some differences, such as Sweden being further to the left (direct) on negative feedback and further to the right (avoiding confrontation) on disagreeing. FIGURE 7.1. DISAGREEING

France Russia Spa Netherlands	in Italy UK	Brazil Mexico Kenya Ghana Japan Singapore Saudi Arabia Thailand
Confrontational		Avoids confrontation
Confrontational		is positive for the team or organization. propriate and will not negatively impact

That different cultures treat time differently is one of the most

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common observations for anyone working or even traveling abroad. On one extreme you've got the exceedingly precise Germans and Swiss; Americans fall relatively close to this end of the spectrum; Western Europeans and Latin Americans tend to be more flexible; Africa, the Middle East, and India are extremely flexible.

FIGURE 8.1. SCHEDULING

Switzerland Swed	Netherlands en US UK Denmark	Poland Czech Republic		pain Italy Russia N	Brazil China Mexico Turkey	Saudi Arabia India Nigeria Kenya
 Linear time 					Fle	xible time
Linear time	beginning the deadline and s	are approached in next. One thing sticking to the so over flexibility.	at a time.	No interru	uptions. The foci	us is on the
Flexible time	arise. Many hi	are approached in ngs are dealt wit y and glexibility	h at once	and interru	uptions accepted	
hanks to Me Culture Map.''	,	etting us p	ublish	these	e charts fi	rom "The

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