

Cross-cultural Working - Toolkit

Cross-Cultural Checklist

1. Think about another country or culture.
2. Complete the checklist answering Yes, No or Don't Know to each question.
3. Where you answer Don't Know, how will you find out about the answer to this cultural question?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Non verbal communication			
Should I expect differences in what is thought of as appropriate 'personal space'?			
Should I anticipate differences in the way my counterparts use touch?			
Is there anything particular I need to be careful about in giving or receiving business cards?			
Should I avoid any particular gestures?			
Should I expect differences in the level of acceptable eye contact?			
Do I know what body language is taboo?			

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Communication			
Should I anticipate different attitudes about the acceptability of asking personal questions?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes towards the acceptability of humour and emotions?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes towards the acceptability of interrupting?			

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Do I know what type of argument is likely to be most persuasive?			
Should I anticipate a different attitude towards addressing difficult issues directly?			
Do I know what style of feedback is acceptable?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the expression of criticism?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the expression of anger?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the formality of feedback?			
Do I know the range of ways in which disagreement is likely to be expressed?			
Should I expect a different style of conflict resolution?			
Should I anticipate different expectations about the use of silence?			
Should I anticipate different communication styles to be in use?			
Do I know when to use first names and surnames?			
Do I know what professional titles to use?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes towards small-talk?			
Should I anticipate different attitudes towards the importance of saving face?			
Should I anticipate a different use of tone or pitch when speaking?			
Should I expect different attitudes towards displays of affection?			

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The Values at Work Checklist

Research suggests that the way in which each of us thinks and acts at work can be influenced by the attitudes and values in the cultures to which we belong.

When we come into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds we can sometimes encounter workplace behaviour that does not match our assumptions and expectations. We can sometimes even misinterpret other people's workplace behaviour and make incorrect assumptions based on our own cultural background. This can result in confusion, misunderstandings and even conflict.

The checklist been designed to help you identify some of the ways in which your cultural background has had an impact on your workplace behaviour.

On the following pages you will find several statements asking about the way in which you prefer to communicate and the way in which you prefer to learn, think and apply knowledge.

1. Read each description in order.
2. Decide which behaviour is closest to your own. If you identify with both statements, choose the one you identify with more often, or in more situations.
3. Mark a score indicating how strongly you tend to exhibit this behaviour.
4. When you have completed this activity, decide how you think people in a different culture of interest to you would probably respond to the statements.
5. Where you have identified important cultural differences between you approach and that of people in the culture or country of interest to you, consider...
 - Are these differences important?
 - How might these differences become apparent in the working environment?
 - How might people from that country or culture perceive your approach?
 - What challenge do these differences present?
 - In what ways might you adapt your behaviour to manage and overcome these cultural differences?

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Direct					Indirect				
I prefer people to go directly to the point and not to spend time beating around the bush.					I think it is important to avoid conflict even if it means only hinting at difficult issues.				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
Being frank					Saving face				
It is important to be frank, open and honest at all times, even at the risk of causing others to lose face and experience shame.					It is important that nothing I do causes others to lose face, even if this means that I have to find other ways of transmitting important information.				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
Theory					Practise				
I prefer to learn by receiving and absorbing information from an expert source					I prefer to learn by exploring, practising and experimenting with new ideas.				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
Deal					Relationship				
When I have a job to do, I prefer to focus on the task: walking straight into the situation, sorting things out and moving on.					When I have a job to do, I prefer to focus on the people: spending time getting to know those I will work with.				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
Prompt					Flexible				
I prefer people to stick strictly to measurable and structured deadlines. Being on time is the key to efficiency.					I prefer people to take a flexible approach to timekeeping. Being flexible about deadlines is the key to efficiency.				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5

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<p>Teacher</p> <p>I prefer to give out precise and detailed instructions to people I work with. It is important that people do what they are told.</p>					<p style="text-align: right;">Facilitator</p> <p>I prefer to guide people towards making as many of their own decisions as possible. It is important people take the initiative at work.</p>				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Informal</p> <p>I prefer to talk with people in an informal way, regardless of who they are or what position they hold.</p>					<p style="text-align: right;">Formal</p> <p>I prefer to show the proper level of respect for position and status by using formal titles, surnames or polite forms of address.</p>				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Logic</p> <p>I prefer to stick to logic and facts when I am arguing a case. In business, emotions should be controlled as much as possible.</p>					<p style="text-align: right;">Feeling</p> <p>I prefer to display emotions and warmth when I am arguing a case. In business, emotions should be listened to and respected.</p>				
5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5

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'Hofstede's Five-Dimension Model' handout

Probably the most influential of all the 'dimensionalists', Hofstede uses the following five dimensions to analyse cultural characteristics.

- Power distance

Power distance reflects the degree to which a society accepts the idea that power is to be distributed unequally through hierarchical distinctions. The more this is accepted, the higher the country's ranking in power distance. High power-distance culture can be characterized by a strong hierarchal structure within their organizations. In such societies, managers are respected in and out of the organization and are rarely publicly contradicted.

By contrast, low power-distance societies tend to value notions of empowerment for employees and consensual decision-making. In Europe, current levels of power distance rather neatly match the boundaries of the former Roman Empire. Former Roman spheres of influence tend to resolve the essential tension between low and high power distance in favour of the latter. The opposite is true in areas that were not influenced by Roman values.

- Individualism versus collectivism

Individualism reflects the degree to which individual beliefs and actions should be independent of collective thought and action. Individualism contrasts with collectivism, which is the belief that people should integrate their thoughts and actions with those of a group (for example, extended family, or employer). In individualistic societies people are more likely to pursue their own personal goals.

In collective societies people are more likely to integrate their own goals with those of other group members and tend to avoid putting people in situations where they might lose face. The cohesion of the group plays a more important role than pursuing one's own individual achievement.

- Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which a society feels threatened by ambiguous situations and tries to avoid them by formulating rules and refusing to tolerate deviance. In essence, it relates to an essential tension about the nature of 'truth'. The more a society accepts that truth is 'absolute', the higher it ranks on uncertainty avoidance. Societies that rank high on uncertainty avoidance have highly structured working environments.

Employees and managers pay attention to precise objectives and clear rules, detailed assignments and schedules set up well in advance.

- Masculinity versus femininity

This dimension relates to essential tension between attitudes towards gender. Masculinity describes the degree to which the focus is placed on assertiveness, task achievement and

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the acquisition of material goods. This is contrasted with femininity in which quality-of-life issues such as caring for others, group solidarity and helping the less fortunate are valued.

- Long-term versus short-term orientation CDI (Confucian Dynamism Index)

The essential conflict in this dimension relates to attitudes towards what is, and what is not, considered 'virtuous'. Long-term cultures focus on the distant future and emphasize the importance of saving, persistence and achieving goals that may only come to fruition after several generations. Short-term cultures emphasize the past and the present, and there is respect for fulfilling social obligations and a consistent understanding of morality.

Hofstede claimed that Chinese people have a relatively high Confucian dynamism index value, while American people have a relatively low Confucian dynamism index value. He suggested that this distinction is reflected in business. In China top management emphasizes thrift and perseverance and respect for tradition, and also maintains a long-term orientation (that is, the company is regarded as a family). In contrast, in the USA, top management is said to focus on current needs, creativity and adopting a short-term orientation.

Read the four short incidents described below. Underline any sentences that suggest cultural differences were at work and answer the following questions:

- How would you explain these differences in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions?
- What hints or tips would you give to each of the people below to overcome cultural barriers?

Sarah

Sarah Marshall is head of the business development group at a US-based law firm. Recently she was assigned the task of winning a contract for a new project with the Colombian government. She was competing with teams from Spain and France.

Sarah had quite a lot of background information on the proposed project and on the packages her competitors were offering. On the basis of this information and her organization's extensive resources she felt confident that the company would win the contract.

Sarah drew up a proposal that was time and cost-effective and designed a presentation based on convincing numbers and a persuasive argument. Arriving in Bogota the day before, Sarah personally made the sales pitch in which she detailed all the relevant facts, highlighted the various ways forward and made a clear recommendation of the best solution. She eventually lost the project to the Spanish team, even though her Colombian counterparts acknowledged the quality of her proposals.

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Richard

Richard, an Australian, is part of a team of lawyers based in Paris. Claude, 48, is the team's PA. Claude works from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with an hour and a half for lunch.

Richard is very pleased with the quality of Claude's work and her commitment to the team. Unfortunately because of his extensive travel commitments abroad he has never had the opportunity to have lunch with her or spend any time with her and the team outside the work environment. After a while Richard asks to be addressed by his first name and the informal 712. Several months later, however, Claude is still calling him 'Monsieur Lafleur' and addressing him with 'Voulez-vous bien...' although Richard calls her 'Claude' and addresses her with 'Veux-tu

Richard is puzzled and decides to talk to Claude about this matter in order to clarify the situation.. To his amazement Claude replies that she prefers to call him by his surname and refer to him with the formal vous.

Karl

Karl, a Dutch lawyer, felt that his first business trip to Japan was going fairly well. He was determined to get to know his colleagues better and was particularly pleased to be invited out for drinks after work with most of the team, including the senior managers.

At the bar, everyone was expected to entertain; even the senior staff got to sing karaoke songs or tell jokes. Everything seemed fairly informal and cooperative, with Karl's karaoke version of 'Imagine' winning rapturous applause from the group. One of the senior managers even asked Karl for a repeat rendition later in the evening.

Keeping this informality in mind, Karl used a team meeting early the next morning to present a proposal for resolving a minor logistics problem he had noticed. He was surprised to be met with a wall of embarrassed silence and was noticeably excluded from informal exchanges as people left the meeting.

Rebecca

Rebecca, a recently recruited British executive in an international law firm, was asked to chair a meeting with her French and British colleagues.

From Rebecca's point of view, the meeting went well. She did her utmost to make sure that everyone was heard and the relevant issues discussed and summarized in a diplomatic way. She even changed the agenda and extended the meeting to accommodate new issues that some British delegates had brought up.

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At the end of the meeting Rebecca was shocked to hear one French colleague whisper to another `... typical British, just typical. No proper preparation...'. She was even more surprised to hear the reply: 'Yes, and they never say what they mean, do they?'

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Cross-cultural Communication Skills Checklist

Read each of the following strategies and techniques for communicating effectively across cultures.

On the right hand side, write down some specific behaviour that describes how you can put each strategy or technique into practice. The first two have some examples already inserted.

Strategies and techniques.	How you can put this in practice.
Clarify frequently	<p>Paraphrase what you think you have heard to make sure that you understand the communication accurately.</p> <p>Emphasize the feelings expressed, as well as the substance.</p> <p>Confirm that you accurately understand and acknowledge the message, even if you do not agree with it.</p>
Use active listening	<p>Demonstrate interest.</p> <p>Acknowledge comments with your head or voice.</p> <p>Avoid mistaking vagueness for ambiguity or disinterest.</p>
Summarise frequently	
Aim for dialogue, not debate.	
Be structured and clear.	
Be open and friendly.	
Invite feedback, do not just expect it.	

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Use questions effectively and often.	
Keep positive.	
Grade your language to suit your counterpart.	
Make sure that your verbal and non-verbal communication agrees.	
Know yourself to know others.	



United Kingdom

Indirect

The preference is for indirect communication to avoid direct confrontation, which feels stressful and awkward to most British.

Examples and Variances:

Indirect communication is commonly used to minimize the appearance of difference and to maintain a civilized style on the surface despite what is really happening.

The exception to this orientation is where there is a crisis or a breaking of the law where extreme directness is seen as appropriate and necessary.

It is often said that in the north or in Scotland there is a preference to “tell it like it is” and to “get to the point,” though there is little scientific evidence to support this.

High Context

The preference is for high context communication, where meaning is implied and hinted at, but not always explained explicitly.

Examples and Variances:

This value is taught to the British as being polite behavior, a sophisticated form of communication and where subtlety has merit.

The exception to this is with technical detail, virtual teams, and complex projects. In these cases, there is a pragmatic level of explicit detail that must be communicated to insure that the message is received clearly and that the task is completed in a consistent and specific fashion.

Hierarchy

There is a preference for hierarchy in the United Kingdom displayed by the divisions between ranks and classes.

Examples and Variances:

Historically, business has been divided between middle class managers and leaders and lower class workers and employees. This has now changed significantly to a more meritocratic and knowledge-based differentiation. However, there is still some feeling of comfort and security when someone senior displays confidence, competence, and wisdom. A hierarchical system depends upon the lower level acceptance of higher level authority.

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This is reconciled in the United Kingdom by the fact that the meritocratic system means that one day the lower orders will be allowed to rise.

The exception is around decision making, when a leader can find himself or herself criticized for making a tough decision that adversely affects a large number of workers. In economic crises, they tend to pull toward a more equality-oriented system, but this rarely lasts once the crisis has passed.

Order

There is a preference for order, as expectations of the employee are made explicitly.

Examples and Variances:

Clarity is valued in task setting, job descriptions, and pushing for a specific desired result. The absence of defined parameters tends to cause anxiety and complaint.

The exception is in the creative area or with a group of high potential individuals working in a team. They may prefer to be unrestrained and allowed to set their own limits.

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Germany

Direct

Germans tend to display a preference for a direct orientation. They are likely to voice problems directly and appreciate directness from others.

Examples and Variances:

Germans often use conflict situations to come to the correct decision. This is not considered personal but more as a way to reach the right resolution. Most Germans have been taught their whole lives that this is the appropriate way; motivated people are expected to address conflicts directly. This allows everyone to understand the situation and to look for solutions.

In the North, people tend to be even more direct than those who live in the South of Germany.

Certain topics may not be discussed openly, particularly those that are perceived as too personal.

Low Context

Germans tend to be low-context communicators, and they generally rely on explicit and precise communication of meaning.

Examples and Variances:

Few quotes, aphorisms, and word games are used in the German language. Germans do not often try to bring the discussion to another level or hide the meaning between the lines. One usually does not tell stories/use images in discussions. Germans communicate often directly and explicitly. They do not use as many nuances, meaningful pictures and non-verbal cues.

With email communication, a German tends to think, "I have written an email, and things are clear now." Clear written communication like email is considered very important. It can be perceived as a weakness if someone uses an overly high context way of communicating because Germans often believe that this person cannot express himself or herself clearly. However, the closer a relationship is the more important behavior and nonverbal cues become.

The direct translation of the German language and idioms can cause foreigners to feel Germans are very harsh and set their opinions very quickly. For example, "*Sie müssen*" is often translated to "You must," when many times it is meant as "You must consider."

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Equality

Power plays an important role in Germany, but with less focus on hierarchy. Germans tend to be more equality oriented, minimizing social stratification.

Examples and Variances:

Since the Second World War, Germans are wary of having too much power in the hands of one person. They accept authority but learn at school that it is important to question it.

Superiors generally are more respected for their knowledge and competence than for their hierarchical positions. For this reason, Germans value titles (proof of expertise) much more than rank. Expert knowledge is more important and more acceptable than a hierarchical position. Authority that is seen as too strong is viewed very skeptically.

A German boss often expects open and direct constructive criticism and asks openly for it in meetings.

Many decisions within a team are made during team meetings that include all members. This can sometimes result in heated discussions between team members, but all parties are involved prior to coming up with a solution.

A recognized expert can have significant decision making power because of his or her status. It is often believed that they should not need to ask their managers for decision making power if they are the experts/specialists. Once status as an expert or an authority on a specific subject is lost, it is very difficult to return to that level of power.

Germans may be perceived as hierarchical from the outside, most likely because foreigners often only see an unquestioning commitment to a superior's decision. Foreigners do not usually realize that many people have been involved in the decision making process and that the boss is rather validating what was said rather than deciding himself or herself.

Order

Germans tend to be order oriented, putting an emphasis on rules and procedures and wanting predictability to minimize ambiguity.

Examples and Variances:

Many employees expect a defined and detailed job description. Germans often mention their job descriptions if they are asked to do something that is not part of it. If something is not written in the contract, they may refuse to perform the task to avoid making any mistakes.

For example, if one needs important information from a German employee while another German colleague is on holiday or out of the office, the response may be that the German employee cannot help and to call again in two weeks, even if the German employee could provide some possible insights about the requested information.

Germans tend to spend a lot of time on planning in order to have less ambiguity. A German who feels unsecured often creates a procedure.

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However, higher degrees of education tend to correlate with less-defined job descriptions and more comfort in flexibility in general.

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Belgium

Indirect / Direct

The Flemish tend to speak more directly, like their German and Dutch cousins, while the Walloons, similar to their French relatives, are likely to communicate indirectly. Thus, while the Flemish will tend to state a problem or criticism outright, Walloons will be more likely to speak of it in general terms, or to deal with the situation through analogy or metaphor.

For example:

A simple, straightforward style will please the Flemish, while excessive directness, aggressiveness or a boastful presentation will irritate them.

The Walloons are more impressed with indirect suggestions or allusions to solutions. They, too, are likely to interpret overly assertive speech as arrogance.

High Context

Belgians are high context communicators, relying on their partners' ability to infer meanings from their statements or suggestions, rather than making certain that the meanings are always entirely explicit.

For example:

Belgians often assume their conversation partners possess a certain level of familiarity with history, culture, and current events, based on the fact that the country is rather small, notwithstanding the cultural divide between Flanders and Wallonia.

Hierarchy

Belgian businesses display a hierarchy orientation, with a clear distinction between senior managers with the power to make decisions and employees at lower levels whose job it is to carry out the decisions.

For example:

The hierarchy orientation is more pronounced in French Belgian companies than in Flemish Belgian companies. Businesses in Wallonia prefer a structured, formal and procedure-oriented organization with a clear hierarchical system and a directive style of leadership. Leaders tend to be well educated and to originate from economically and socially privileged classes. They also enjoy distinctions of their rank, and pay attention to such perks as job title, size of office, quality of furniture, parking space, etc. Relationships between managers and subordinates are traditionally distant and formal.

Flemish companies are slightly more egalitarian and have a somewhat flatter structure with

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a less clear differentiation of power. Hierarchical lines and formal communication channels are still observed, but they are tempered with informal networking, ad hoc meetings and active consensus. The boss is expected to be approachable and familiar with all aspects of the operation. Offices have a simple and functional design.

Flexibility / Order

Belgians are comfortable with an order orientation toward, placing a high value on predictable procedures, security and general peace. At the same time, Belgians tend to utilize their flexibility orientation by learning to work within and often around rules and regulations asserting their individuality in the face of restrictions.

For example:

The willingness of Belgians to work around bureaucratic regulations, and their creativity in doing so, is visible not only with respect to government regulations and civil life but in the business world as well.

Belgian business people respect tradition, authority and regulations while at the same time admiring individual initiative and originality, and they attempt wherever possible to combine these two tendencies. While Belgians are moderately to highly risk-averse, they are willing to consider innovative proposals - as long as the proposals seem reasonable to them, given what has been done before, and not a radical departure from established ways of doing things.



Denmark

Direct

Danes exhibit a direct orientation towards written and verbal communication. Ideas and comments are conveyed in an upfront manner in both personal and professional contexts. Nevertheless, this orientation is balanced by Danes' subtle way of not expressing what they think on occasion and by their general avoidance of confrontation.

For example:

After initial personal introductions at the beginning of a meeting, Danes address business issues quickly and directly.

Danes express their message directly and convey their opinions openly.

Danes' direct communication style is often considered blunt, or even rude, by foreigners with a preference for indirect communication.

Because Danes prefer to avoid conflicts, they approach negotiations in a collaborative manner.

Low Context

In keeping with their low-context orientation, Danes prefer to convey their message explicitly, using non-verbal clues and body language in order to reinforce the meaning of their message. Communication is straightforward in Denmark.

For example:

During negotiations, Danes are generally upfront and clear about what they want and what they expect from others. Information is exchanged during the initial meeting of a negotiation.

Despite the dominant low-context preference, subtlety exists in the Danish communication style in what is not said during an encounter.

Equality

Danes demonstrate an equality orientation in regard to power and authority. The code of behavior known as the "Law of Jante" is at the source of Danes' emphasis on equality. This code states that no one is above their peers, regardless of their social background, position at work, wealth or education.

For example:

In most occasions, Danes treat everyone with the same degree of respect, irrespective of their age, social status or title.

Danes remain unpretentious in social and work interactions. They rarely promote their accomplishments or skills in the workplace. Danes are likely to underplay their role and maintain an ironic distance from themselves.

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The hierarchical structure in a Danish company is flat, with team members and managers viewed as equals. Communication between hierarchical levels tends to be open and transparent.

The lack of deference toward superiors often surprises visitors, especially those accustomed to a hierarchical approach to power. In meetings, this orientation can confuse visitors if they are unclear about the identity of the decision maker.

External signs conveying a difference in status tend to be limited and looked down upon.

Order

In line with their order orientation, Danes prefer to minimize ambiguity in the workplace. Danes like rules to be clearly defined and risk limited.

For example:

Employees expect clear guidelines from their manager regarding the planning of a project and the tasks that need to be accomplished.

Because Danes like to keep their meetings well organized, internal and external meetings tend to follow a written agenda.

Danes are attached to stability and value a sense of continuity in both their professional and personal lives.