

**‘A little bit of culture please...’**

**Understanding the Cross-Cultural  
Dimension of Modern Business**

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# Overview

Common Assumptions

Definitions & Dichotomies

5 Specific Areas For Attention

Acquiring Cross-Cultural Intelligence

*but very dangerous!*

# Common Assumptions

“Business is business wherever you go...”

“The world has become a global village...”

“As long as they speak English, everything will be alright...”

“If they don’t speak English, it doesn’t matter- we just need to employ interpreters and translators...”



# Reconciling Business and Culture

... managers and supervisors do not truly understand what culture is. That is, they don't know how culture operates, the part it plays in shaping people's attitudes and ultimately how it determines much of their behaviour.

Not really understanding what culture is or how it works, they cannot be expected to know that cultural differences could be a problem in the workplace ... they think people are just choosing to be difficult.

(Storti, 2000)

# What is Culture?

‘... a giant, extraordinarily complex, subtle computer. Its programs guide the actions and responses of human beings in every walk of life.’ (Hall, 1990)

‘Collective mental programming... the software of the mind...’ (Hofstede, 1991)

‘The way in which a group of people solves problems...’  
(Trompenaars, 1993)

‘A shared system of attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour...’  
(Gibson, 2000)

# What does Culture cover?

Language... Eating habits... Styles of buildings...  
Ways of thinking... Customs... Traditions...  
Religious Beliefs... Etiquette and manners...  
Music... Attitudes to the sexes... Ways of  
dressing... Attitudes towards nature... Beliefs  
about time... Attitudes towards work and leisure...  
Perceptions of good and evil... Concepts of  
beauty... Popular entertainment...  
'Common sense...'

and a whole lot more besides...



# How Culture Manifests itself in the Workplace

Different workplace rules and practices...

International joint ventures... Exporting goods and services... Importing goods and services...

Marketing internationally... Different perceptions of effective management and leadership...

Different attitudes to work... Organizational behaviour and corporate ethics

# Why is Culture Important?

Culture provides us with the blueprint for how to most effectively function within society.

It defines not only our own behaviour, but how we interpret the behaviour of others...

We **all** view the world through a highly subjective cultural lens.



# Can Cultures Be Categorized?

- Individualist vs Collectivist
- High Power Distance vs Low Power Distance
- High vs Low Uncertainty Avoidance
- Achievement vs Ascription
- Universalist vs Particularist
- Specific Relationships vs Diffuse Relationships
- Emotionally Neutral vs Emotionally Expressive
- Long-Term vs Short-Term Time Orientation

(after Hofstede, 1980 and Trompenaars, 1993)

You are riding in a car driven by a close friend. He hits a pedestrian. You know he was going at least 35 miles per hour in an area of the city where the speed limit is 20 miles per hour. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says that if you are prepared to testify under oath that he was only driving at that speed, it may save him from serious consequences.

What right has your friend to expect you to protect him?

*1a My friend has a definite right to expect me to testify to the lower figure.*

*1b He has some right as a friend to expect me to testify to the lower figure.*

*1c He has no right as a friend to expect me to testify to the lower figure*

What do you think you would do in view of the obligations of a sworn witness and the obligation to your friend?

*1d Testify that he was going 20 miles an hour*

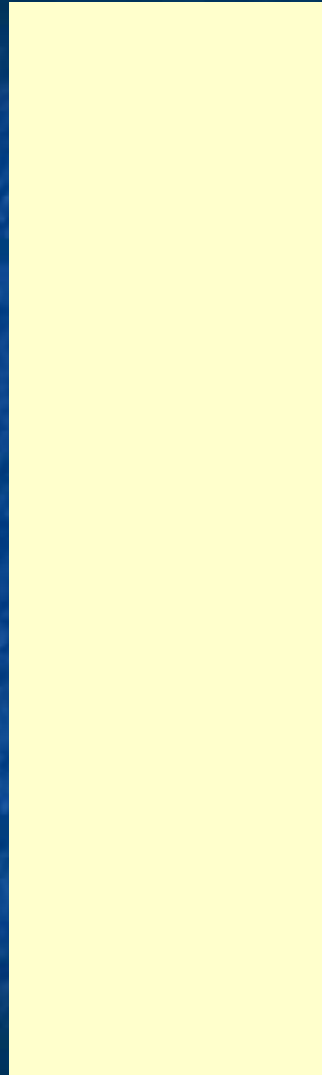
*1e Not testify that he was going 20 miles an hour*

(Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997)

**Universalist**



**Particularist**



Look at the 10 countries in the box below.

Which ones would you see as being *Universalist* in their outlook i.e. the rules are always the rules, and which ones as being *Particularist* i.e. the rules may sometimes be modified depending on the exact circumstances of each particular situation?

Greece Spain Sweden  
Japan France UK  
USA India Venezuela  
Germany



How might the differences between Universalists and Particularists manifest themselves in the workplace?

What *tips* might you give Universalists and Particularists to help them work more effectively with one another:

- a) When they're doing business together
- b) When they're managing and being managed

# Workplace Differences

(adapted from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997)

## Universalists

Focus more on rules than relationships

Rely on legal contracts

Trustworthy = honouring word or contract

There is only one truth, that which has been agreed to

A deal is a deal

## Particularists

Focus more on relationships than rules

Readily modify legal contracts

Trustworthy = honouring changing circumstances

There are several perspectives on reality, relative to each participant

Relationships evolve

# Tips For Doing Business

(adapted from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997)

## With Universalists

Be prepared for 'rational' and 'professional' arguments

Do not interpret impersonal 'let's get down to business' attitudes as rude

If in doubt, carefully prepare the legal ground with a lawyer in advance

## With Particularists

Be prepared for personal 'meandering' and 'irrelevancies'

Do not interpret personal 'let's get to know one another' attitudes as irrelevant small talk

Consider how legal 'safeguards' may be interpreted on a personal level



# 1. Business Behaviour

- Deal-Focused Cultures
- Moderately Deal-Focused Cultures
- Relationship-Focused Cultures

(Gesteland, 2005)

UK The Arab World USA Northern Europe Africa Chile Asia

- **Deal-Focused Cultures**

Northern Europe; the UK; North America  
Australia and New Zealand

- **Moderately Deal-Focused Cultures**

South Africa

Latin Europe; Central & Eastern Europe

Chile, southern Brazil; northern Mexico

Hong Kong, Singapore

- **Relationship-Focused**

The Arab World; Most of Africa, Latin America & Asia

(Gesteland, 2005)

# Common Traits of Deal-Focused Cultures

- Time governs events
- Change may come easily
- Directness is prized above indirectness
- Legalities may be emphasized and adhered to
- What you know may be prized over who you know; expertise may trump status
- ‘Truth’ is an absolute
- Results get precedence over processes



# Common Traits of Relationship-Focused Cultures

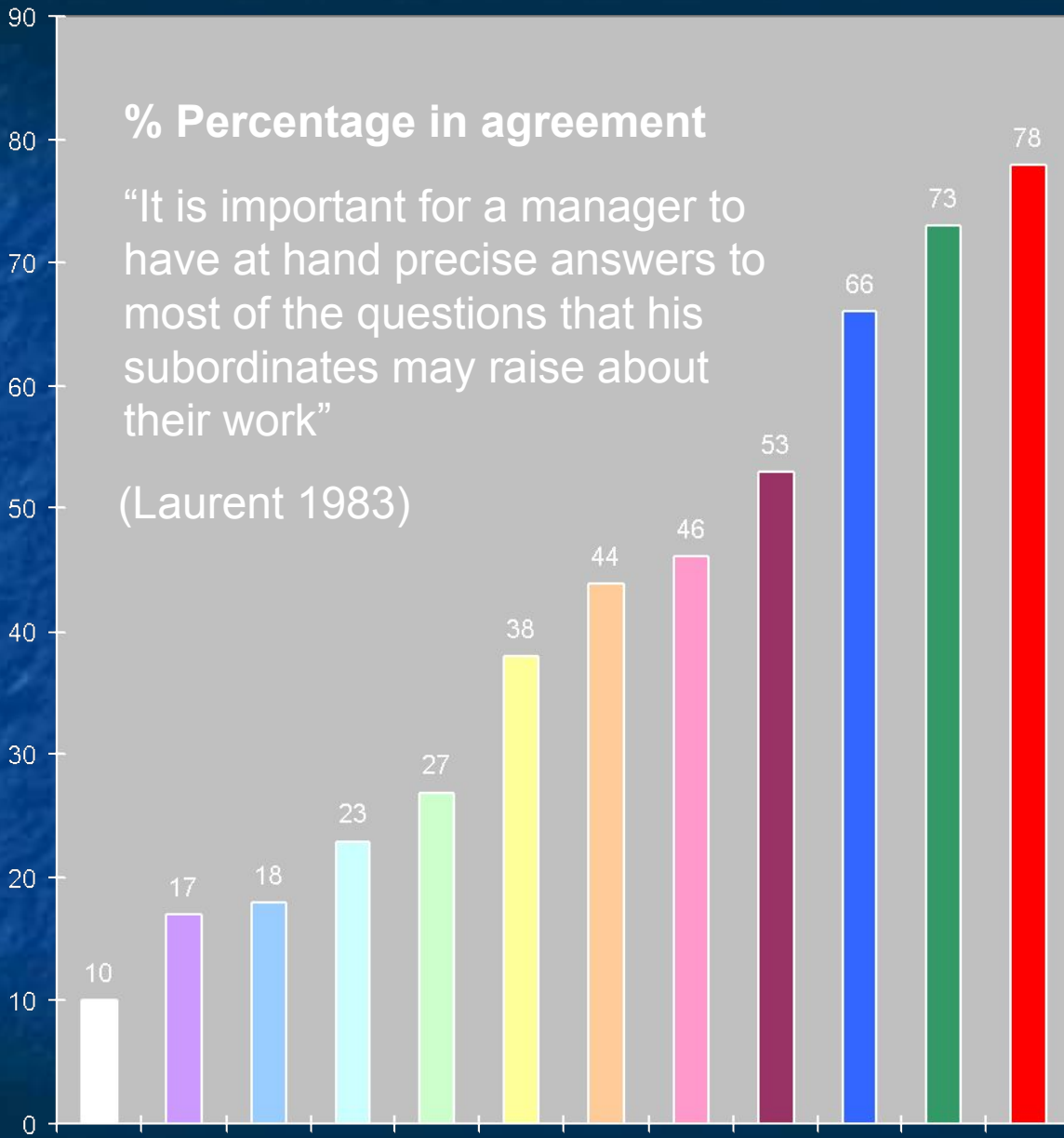
- Events may govern time
- Change may be perceived as a threat
- Indirectness is prized above directness
- Legalities may be downplayed
- Who you know may be prized over what you know; status may trump expertise
- ‘Truth’ is variable
- Processes are just as important as the results

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 1

### *An American talking about Venezuela*

Whenever I meet a new business prospect, I spend half my time answering questions about my family, mutual acquaintances, my trip there, and so on. This means I have to make 3 visits to the country in order to do something that should really only take one...

(Olofsson, 2004)

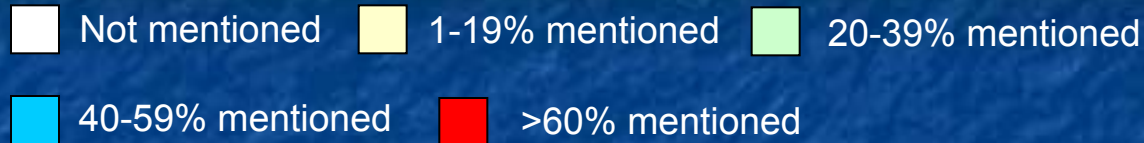


- Belgium**
- Sweden**
- UK**
- Italy**
- Japan**
- USA**
- Germany**
- France**
- Indonesia**
- Netherlands**
- Denmark**
- Switzerland**

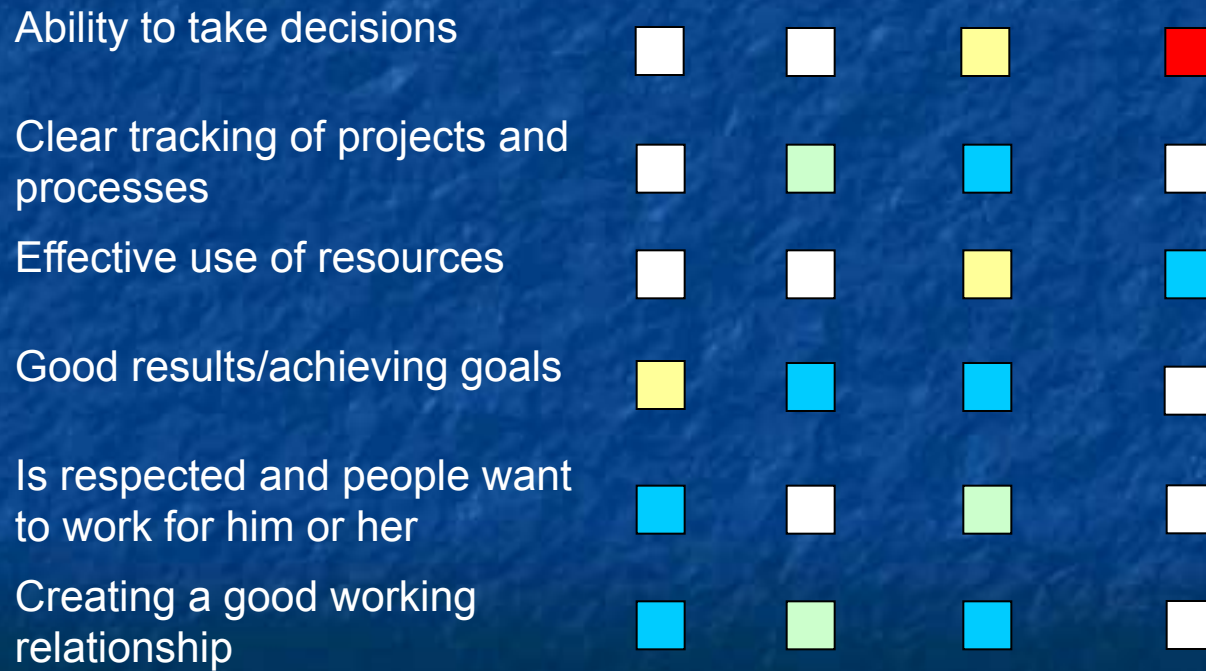


# Q: How do you assess the general effectiveness of a manager?

(Garrett & Gnnann 1997)



## Key Factors



**Germany**

**UK**

**France**

**USA**

## 2. Communication Style

### High-Context:

Most of the information being transmitted is either in the physical context or internalized in the person and is therefore *implicit* i.e. what counts is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said, *when* it is said, to *whom* it is said, not to mention what *not* is said etc. 'Yes' might actually mean 'No'.

### Low-Context:

Most of the information being transmitted is invested directly in the means of communication and is *explicit* i.e. what counts is *what* is actually said. 'Yes' always means 'Yes', 'No' always means 'No'.

(Hall, 1976)

Look at the dialogue below between a North American (MARIAN) and an Indian (KUMAR). What do you think each party is communicating?

**KUMAR:** Marian. How are you?

**MARIAN:** I'm fine thanks. I was wondering, what would you think if we decided to move up the date for the systems test?

**KUMAR:** Move it up?

**MARIAN:** Just by a week, at the most.

**KUMAR:** I see. Do you think it's possible?

**MARIAN:** Should be. But what do *you* think?

**KUMAR:** Me? I guess you don't see any problems?

**MARIAN:** Not really. My people can be ready at this end, if your people can be up to speed by then.

**KUMAR:** I see...



**High-Context**



Rank the communication styles of the 9 countries below on a scale of high-context to low-context

**COUNTRIES**

Greece	Spain	France
Japan	Italy	UK
USA	China	Germany

**Low-Context**

## High-Context:

Starts from the *general* and works towards the specific

## Low-Context:

Starts from the *specific* and works towards the general

The marketing manager of a major US car producer was finding it increasingly difficult to work in Japan. In meetings, his Japanese colleagues hardly ever said anything. When they were asked if they agreed with his suggestions, they always said 'Yes' but they didn't do anything to follow up on these ideas. The only time they opened up was in a bar in the evening, but that was getting stressful, as they seemed to expect him to go out with them on a regular basis.

(adapted from Gibson, 2000)

# Common Traits of High Context Cultures

- Reluctance to say 'No' directly
- Reliance on verbal codes
- Surface harmony and 'face' are highly prized
- Verbosity may be viewed with suspicion; words may be used sparingly
- Modesty and self-deprecation are highly valued
- Words only form *part* of the message
- Ambiguity may be viewed positively



# Common Traits of Low Context Cultures

- Words will carry the bulk of the message
- An element of ‘selling yourself’ is expected and valued
- Silences may be evaluated negatively
- ‘Telling it as it is’ will be valued more than ‘beating around the bush’
- Ambiguity will be viewed negatively

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 2

### A Mexican talking about a German

We have a new German manager who is making himself extremely unpopular here. He has introduced a new quality control system that is complicated and takes time to learn. Inevitably mistakes are made. However, when he finds an error, he seems to delight in pointing this out to the person involved in front of everyone. Several people are already thinking of handing in their notices...

(Olofsson, 2004)

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 3

### Nigerian Communication Style

In general, Nigerians start with the general idea and slowly move into the specific, often using a somewhat circuitous route. Their logic is often contextual. They look for the rationale behind behaviour and attempt to understand the context. They tend to examine behaviour in its total context, not merely what they have observed.

(Kwintessential, 2008)



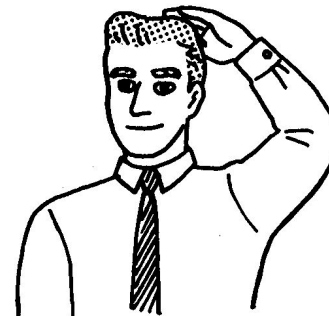
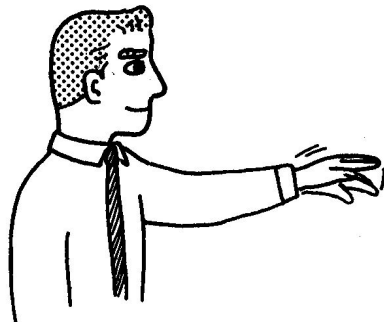
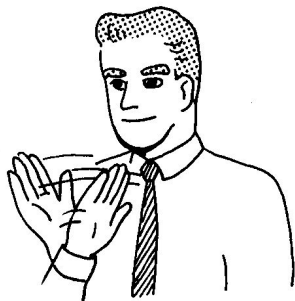
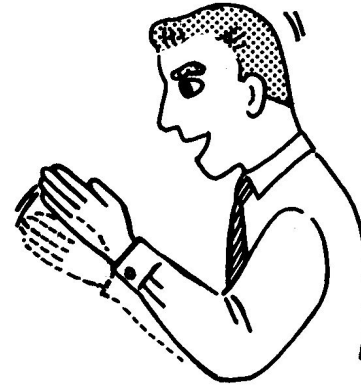
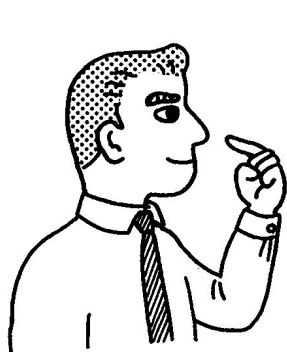
# Some Ways in Which High-Context Communicators Might Say 'No'

- By not saying 'yes' directly
- By not responding at all
- By avoiding the question or changing the subject
- By postponing the response
- By repeating or echoing the question
- By turning the question back on the speaker
- By showing hesitation
- By giving a qualified or conditional 'yes'

### 3. Non-Verbal Communication

- Gestures
- Posture
- Facial Expressions
- Eye Contact & Gaze
- Touching & Physical Contact
- Personal Space
- Dress Codes & Grooming

# Gestures (身ぶり)





## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 4

### Eye-Contact in Nigeria

Many Nigerians employ indirect eye contact to demonstrate their respect for the other person. It is common to gaze at the forehead or shoulders of someone they do not know well. Very direct eye contact may be interpreted as being intrusive unless there is a longstanding personal relationship.

(Kwintessential, 2008)

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 5

### Eye Contact in Azerbaijan

Always maintain eye contact while speaking since Azeris take this as a sign of sincerity. If someone does not look them in the eye while speaking, they think the person has something to hide.

(Kwintessential, 2008)

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 6

### Eye Contact in Afghanistan

Eye contact should be avoided between men and women.

Between men, eye contact is acceptable as long as it is not prolonged - it is best to only occasionally look someone in the eyes.

(Kwintessential, 2008)



## 4. Attitudes to Time

- Monochronic Cultures
- Polychronic Cultures

(Hall, 1976)

Japan Latin America The Arab World Northern Europe USA

- **Monochronic Business Cultures**

Nordic and Germanic Europe

North America

Japan

- **Variably Monochronic**

Australia/New Zealand

Russia and most of East-Central Europe

Southern Europe

Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, South Korea

- **Polychronic Business Cultures**

The Arab World and Africa

Latin America

South and Southeast Asia

(Gesteland, 2005)

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 7

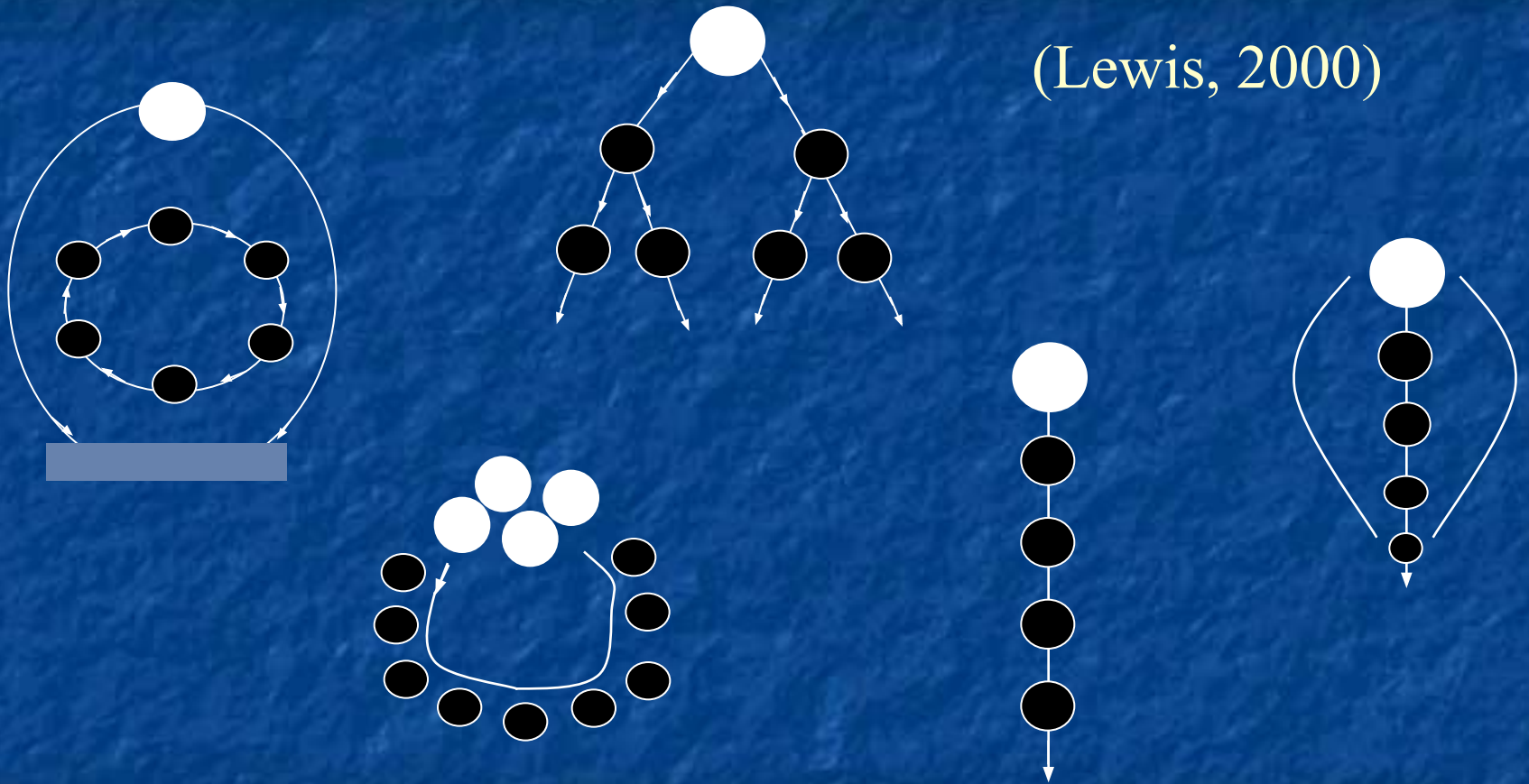
### An Englishman talking about Brazil

I've just returned from a visit to Brazil where I was to meet an influential local factory owner about a supply contract. I'd made the appointment a month before and confirmed it on the phone with his secretary 2 days before we were due to meet. When I turned up, I waited one and a half hours before he deigned to see me. By that time, I was too angry to be as diplomatic as I should have been and the meeting was not a success...

(Olofsson, 2004)

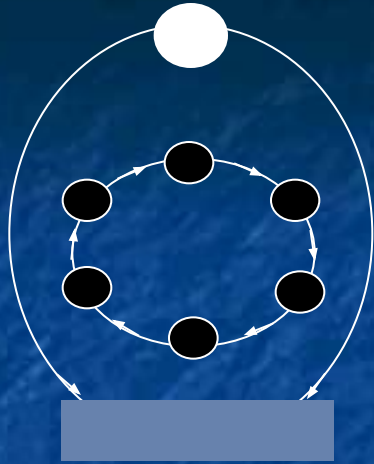


# 5. Hierarchies, Status & Formality



(Lewis, 2000)

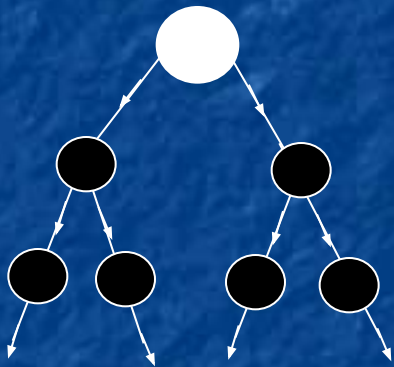
Germany    France    USA    Japan    UK



**UK**



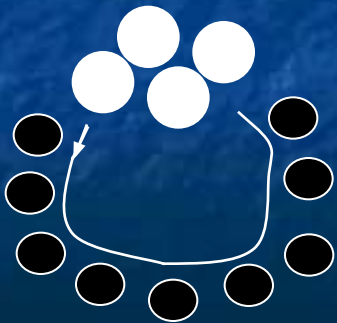
**GERMANY**



**USA**



**FRANCE**



**JAPAN**

(Lewis, 2000)

# Common Traits of Formal Cultures

- Age and accrued experience will be prized
- Behaviour is likely to be strongly governed by TMP (Time; Manner; Place)
- *How* something is done may be just as important as *what* is actually done
- Informality may be judged as unprofessional
- Cutting corners or breaking the rules is likely to be frowned upon



# Common Traits of Informal Cultures

- Youth and ability will be prized
- Behaviour is less likely to be governed by TMP
- *Results* tend to matter more than the process- the end justifies the means
- Ritual and formality may be judged as barriers to effective communication/a waste of time
- An element of corner cutting/breaking the rules will be tolerated as long as it helps the bigger picture; it may even be expected

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 8

### A Pole talking about South Korea

During my recent trips to South Korea, I have built up a good relationship with an engineer of about my own age who works in my own area of expertise. He speaks good English and we have had a number of informal meetings where we've made tentative decisions about some technical developments. However, when his boss is present, he hardly ever opens his mouth, even though this manager has to use an interpreter and does not have a technical background...

(Olofsson, 2004)

# ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 9

## Hierarchies in Nigeria

Age and position earns, even demands, respect. Age is believed to confer wisdom so older people are granted respect. The oldest person in a group is revered and honoured. In a social situation, they are greeted and served first. In return, the most senior person has the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group...

(Kwintessential, 2008)



## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE 10

### Honour in Afghanistan

Honour in Afghan culture defines the reputation and worth of an individual, as well as those they are associated with. If someone's honour has been compromised, they are shamed and will look for a way to exact revenge for themselves, their family or group...

(Kwintessential, 2008)

# Acquiring Cross-Cultural Intelligence

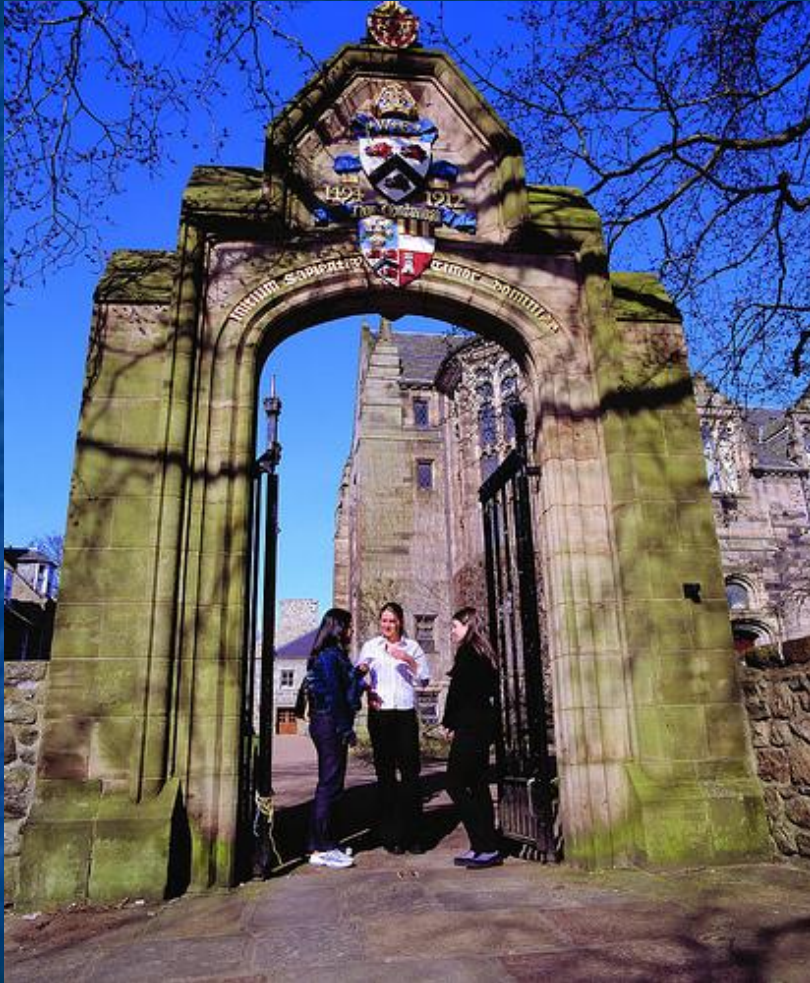
- First acknowledge that cultural differences exist
- Then think carefully about:
  - a) your own national culture
  - b) your company/corporate culture

How might these be perceived by others? How do they influence your own behaviour?

- Describe & Interpret, *before* you Evaluate
- Consider investing in training- you will benefit



# Any Questions?



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