

Cross-Cultural Communication

Ellen Hake

Change communication and cross-cultural management

Why culture is a business issue

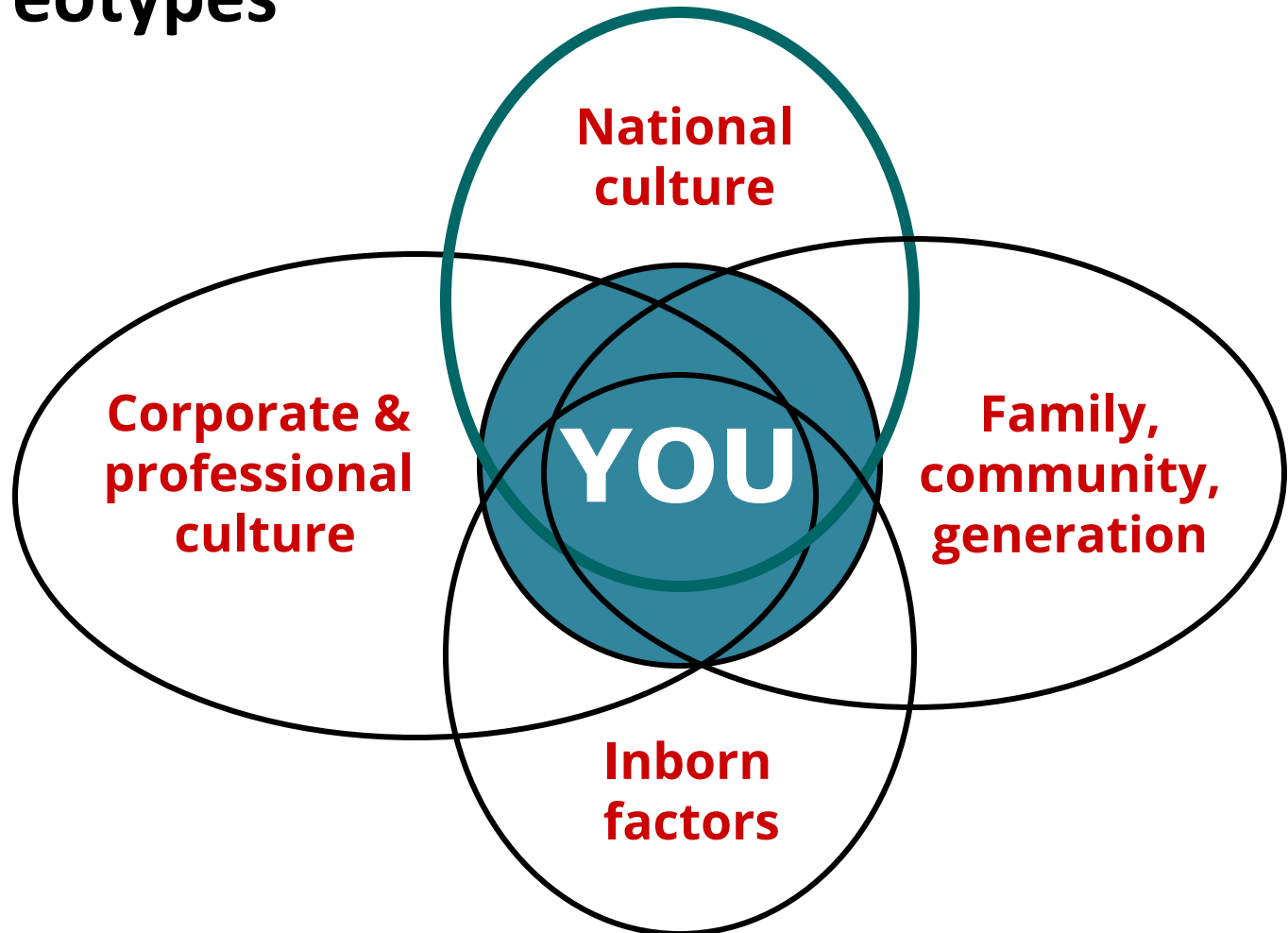
1. More than 80% of cross-border mergers fail to add value (compared to more than 50% of all mergers)

(KPMG study 1999)

2. People without cross-cultural training are **twice as likely to fail** in international assignments.

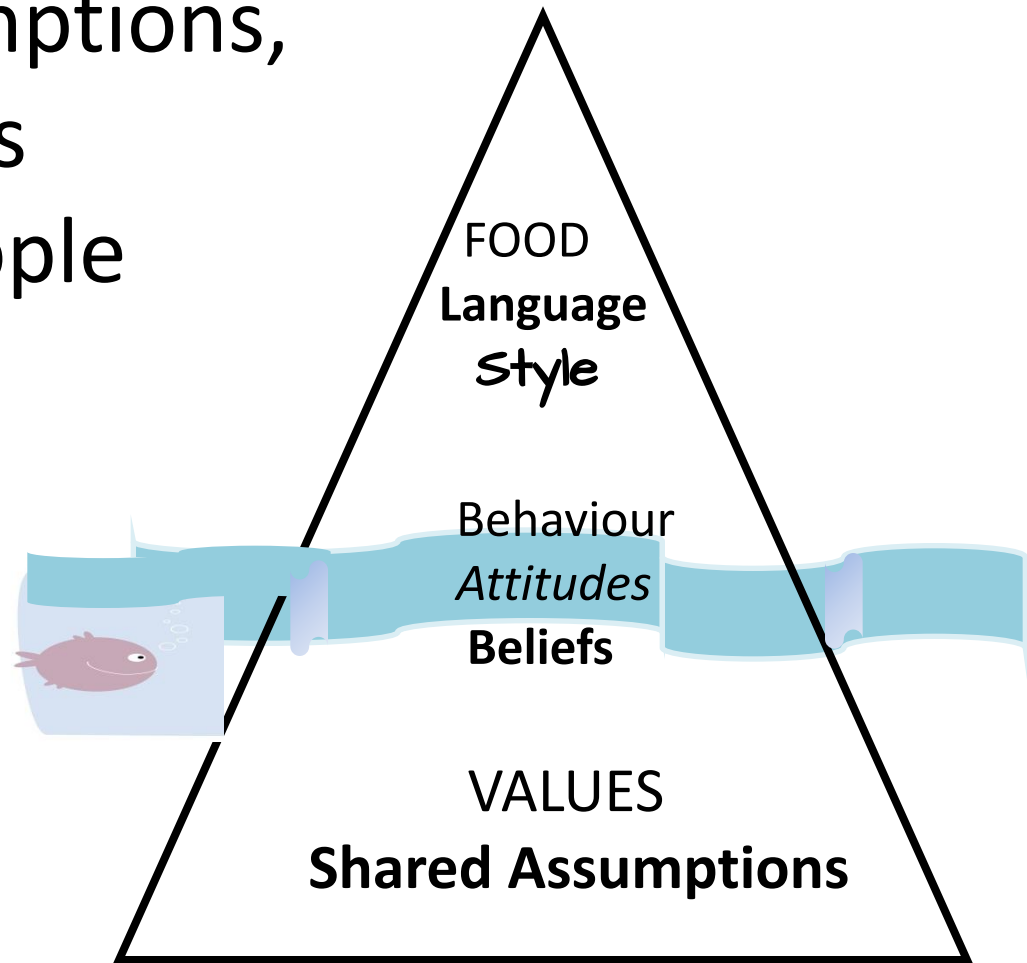
(Brody, Pachter, Complete Business Etiquette Handbook, 33-66% success rate, compared to 98% for those with training)

**Individuals are more
than generalities
or stereotypes**



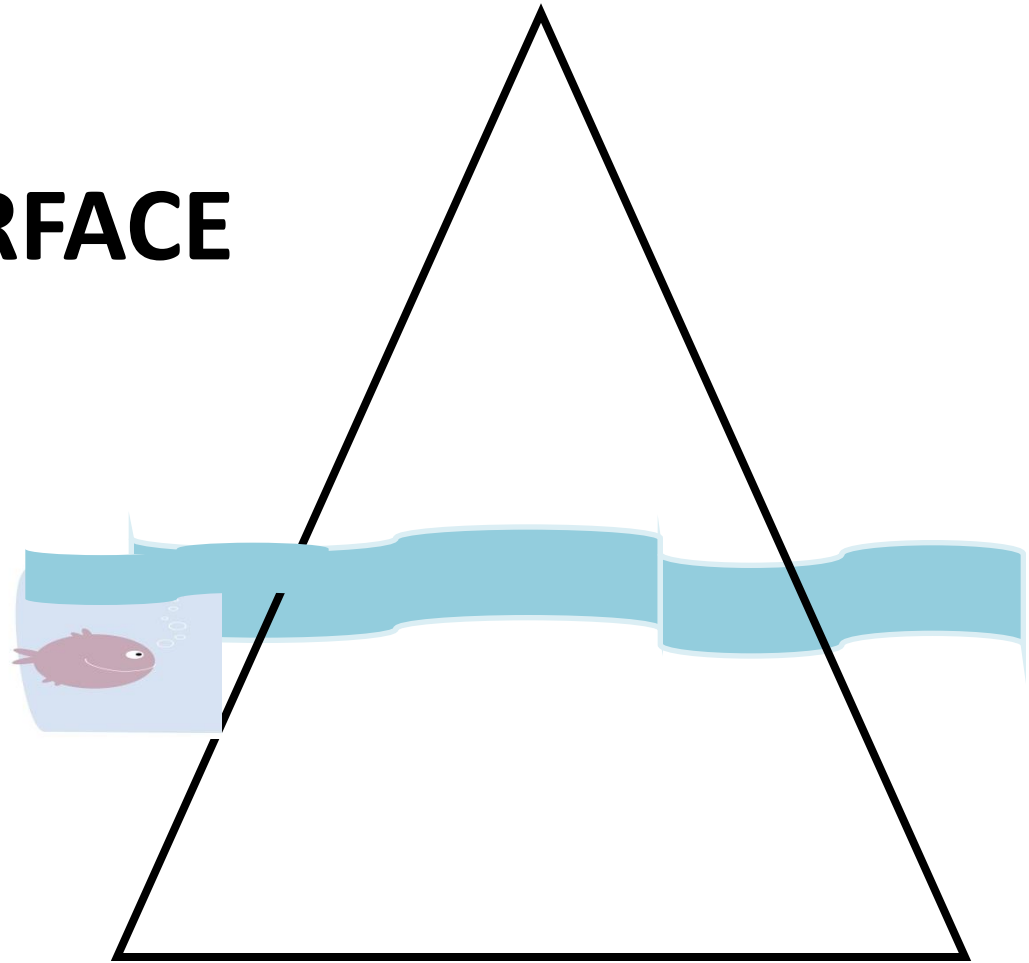
Culture:

the shared assumptions,
values and beliefs
of a group of people
that result in
characteristic
behaviours.

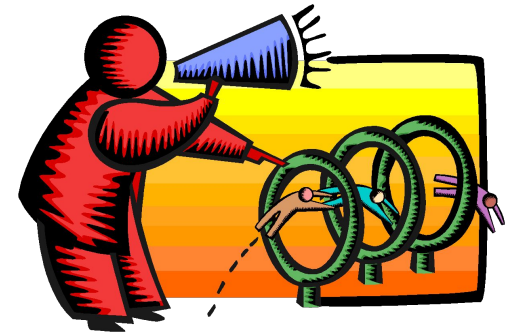


Language and style

ABOVE THE SURFACE



Language: 'global English'



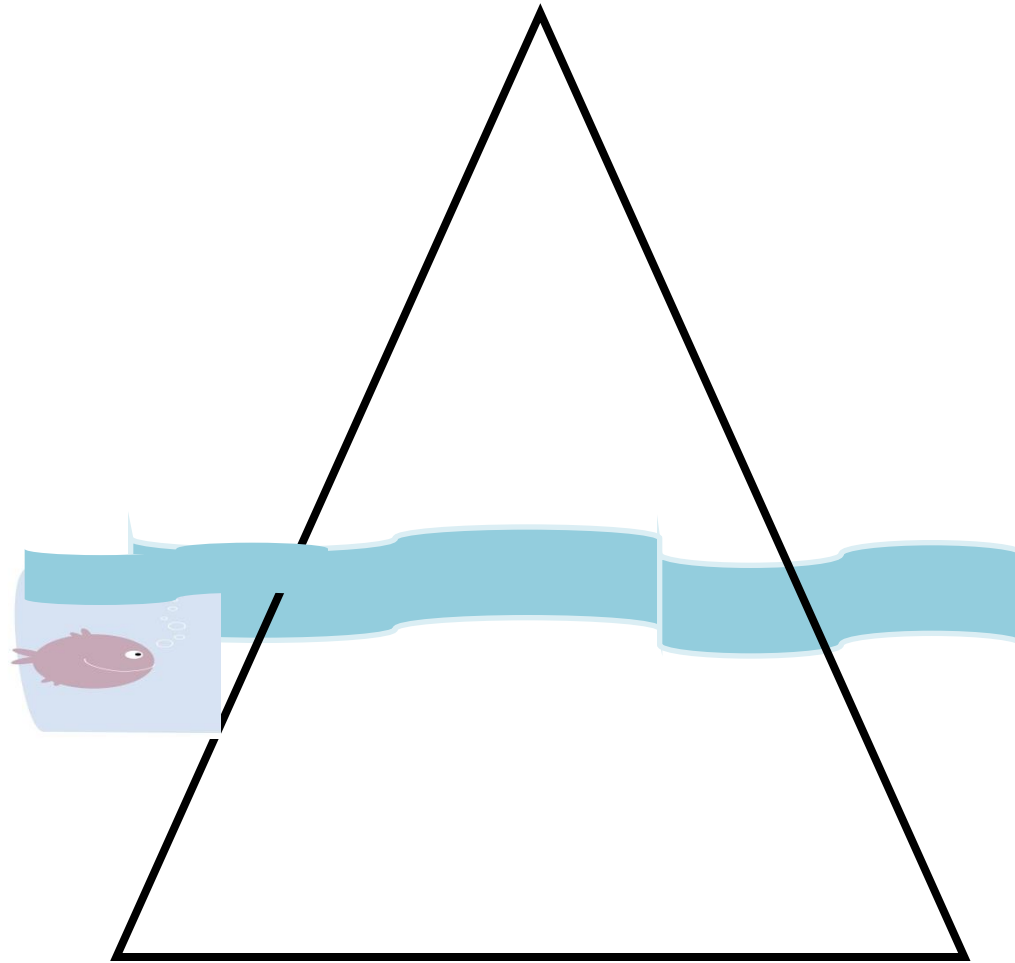
- Speak slowly and pause often
- Consider British versus US English
- Use native speaking translators—
then check translation with your local staff
- *Avoid:*
 - Idioms, slang, uncommon words (soup/broth...
initiative/project...a slam dunk/an easy victory)
 - Double negatives, long and complex sentences (it won't
be impossible in the event of unexpected developments)
 - Expressions from popular culture (lollipop lady, 24/7)

Consider communication style

Some cultures prefer:	Other cultures prefer:
Simplicity, clarity	Eloquence, complexity
Concrete examples	Concepts, principles
Speed, action	Analysis, certainty
Just necessary facts	Context, background, history
Informality, emotion	Formality, dignity
Personal examples	Research, statistics
To listen and accept	To disagree/question speaker

Values and
assumptions

**BELOW
THE SURFACE**



Key research on culture in business

Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner

- Universalism-Particularism
(rules versus relationships)
- Communitarianism-Individualism
(group versus individual)
- Neutral-Emotional
(range of feeling expressed)
- Diffuse-Specific
(all linked versus separate parts)
- Achievement-Ascription
(how status accorded)
- Internal-External Control
(relationship to nature)
- Sequential-Synchronic
(managing time)

Edward Hall

High Context – Low Context



Polychronic – Monochronic

Geert Hofstede

- + Power Distance –
(acceptance of inequality)
- Individualism-Collectivism
(individual versus group)
- + Uncertainty Avoidance –
(is different dangerous?)
- Masculinity-Femininity
(assertive versus nurturing)

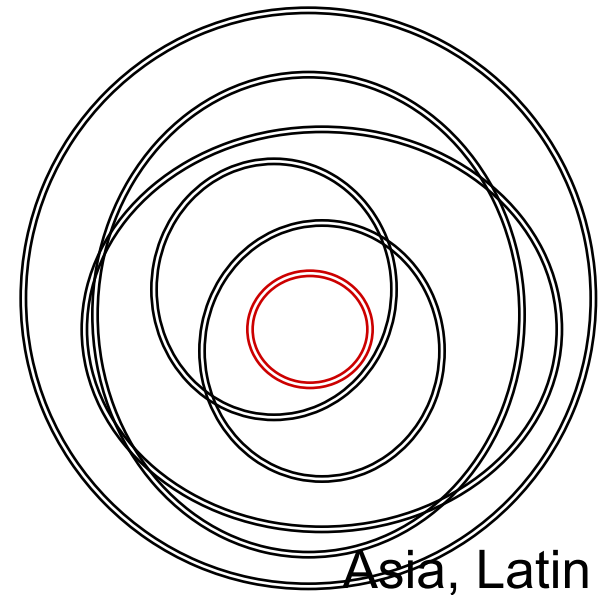
Context in cultural analysis



Highly
Low Context-
Monochronic cultures
(such as U.S., Germany,
Scandinavia): time is linear,
pay attention to schedule

...compared to more
High Context-
Polychronic cultures
(such as France, Mideast
America): you

exist in the centre of time, pay attention to
people who enter into your space, multi-task



the

Values impact communication

Approximation based on research by Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner and others



LOW CONTEXT



- Words are the message
- Monochronic = scheduled
- Direct communication
- Earned status, equality
- Focus on individual & goals
- Rules
- Control own destiny
- Specific, concrete examples

HIGH CONTEXT



- Medium is the message
- Polychronic = multitasking
- Indirect, protect “face”
- Ascribed status, hierarchy
- Focus on relationships
- Relationships
- Controlled by fate
- Shared background, theory



Context in communication

	Words	Voice tone	Real-time feedback	Body language	Environment cues	Informal contacts
Face to face						
Video-conference				Limited	Limited	
Telephone						
Voicemail Podcast						
Email						
Video				Limited	Limited	
Intranet		If video or WebEx	If WebEx	Limited: video or WebEx		
Magazines/ Newsletters		Limited: writing style, artwork				

Tolerance for change

Approximation based on research by Fons Trompenaars, Charles Hampden-Turner and others



ACCEPT UNCERTAINTY

- Facts, figures, concrete
- Fast decision-making
- Individual decisions
- Okay to fail/make a mistake
- Short and medium term plans
- Employment at will

AVOID UNCERTAINTY

- Analysis, theory, philosophy
- Slow to make decisions
- Consensus--or senior decides
- Not okay to fail/get it wrong
- Long term plans
- Employee protection

Strategies for intercultural success

1. Analyze and describe behavior—don't judge it.

("They don't queue" versus "They are rude"...how do I choose to handle that?)

2. Don't assume that you can treat people from different cultures the same way and get the same result.

- Methods that succeed "at home" may not work everywhere.
- Learn about the other country's values, etiquette, management style, achievements and sensitivities.
- Observe and consult with local employees.

3. Adapt your language & check for understanding.

4. Find a local friend, coach or mentor.

Resources

- Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business, *Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner, Nicholas Brealey Publishing*
- Cultures and Organizations, *Geert Hofstede, McGraw-Hill*
- Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French and Americans, *Hall, Intercultural Press*
- Culture Shock USA (or other specific country), *Graphic Arts Center*
- Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands, *Morrison, Conaway, Borden, Bob Adams, Inc. Publishing*

Ellen Hake, ehake@ccmcglobal.com, 0785 071 8695



Relative rankings of some sample countries,
based on research by Geert Hofstede

LARGE POWER DISTANCE					SMALL POWER DISTANCE				
Mexico	Arab Countries	India	Brazil	France	Hong Kong	Spain	Italy	USA	
Germany	UK	Scandinavia	Austria						
INDIVIDUALISM					COLLECTIVISM				
USA	UK	Italy	Sweden	France	Switzerland	Germany	Spain	India	Japan
Arab Countries	Mexico	Asia	South Am.						
UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE					ACCEPTANCE OF UNCERTAINTY				
Greece	Japan	France	Chile	Mexico	South Am.	Italy	Arab Countries	Germany	
Switz	USA	UK	Sweden	Singapore					
MASCULINITY (assertiveness)					(nurturing) FEMININITY				
Japan	Italy	Switzerland	Mexico	UK	Germany	USA	India	Arab Countries	
Taiwan	France	Neth	Sweden						



Relative rankings of some sample countries, based on research by Fons Trompenaars/Charles Hampden-Turner

UNIVERSALISM						PARTICULARISM					
Israel	USA	Switz	Neth	Sweden	Russia	Venezuela	Germany	Italy	Ireland	Greece	France
China	Japan	India	Mexico	Egypt							
COMMUNITARIANISM						INDIVIDUALISM					
Russia	Czech Rep.		USA	Neth	Sweden	Mexico	China	India			
Germany	Japan		Italy	Venezuela							
ACHIEVED STATUS						ASCRIBED STATUS					
USA				Germany		UK		Brazil			
France	China	Saudi Arabia		Japan	India						
INTERNAL CONTROL						EXTERNAL CONTROL					
Israel	USA	UK	France	Neth	Italy	Sweden	Germany	Hong Kong	Japan	Arab	
Countries	Russia		China	Venezuela							
NEUTRAL						EMOTIONAL					
Japan	China	Canada		Sweden	Neth	UK	USA	Mexico	Brazil		
Germany	Italy		Russia	Arab Countries							
SEQUENTIAL TIME (monochronic)						(polychronic) SYNCHRONIC TIME					
Germany	US	UK					China		Japan	France	
India	Mexico	Brazil		Saudi Arabia							



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