

Avoiding culture clashes

1. Say whether you have experienced any challenges or misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions related to the points below.

body language

dress code

language barrier

personal space

politeness

2. Read different opinions, say which one you agree with the most and explain why.

- To succeed in a global business world, it's crucial to understand and identify typical behaviours and norms in different cultures in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- Assuming people's beliefs and behaviours just because of where they come from can lead to stereotyping and oversimplification, which can hinder effective business communication.
- Culture shapes how we perceive the world and how we behave, even if we are not aware of it. So, it's not enough to be aware of someone's cultural background; you also need to know yours in order to enhance cross-cultural business communication.
- Culture doesn't have as much of an impact on business dynamics in comparison to each individual's life experiences or biological factors.

3. You are going to discuss the eight-scale framework called 'The Culture Map', which was developed to help people understand how cultural differences impact international business. Match the names of the scales (A–H) with what they represent (1–8).

A. Communicating

D. Leading

G. Disagreeing

B. Evaluating

E. Deciding

H. Scheduling

C. Persuading

F. Trusting

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|---|---|--|
| 1. convincing people through theory and concepts | ↔ | convincing people using opinions or facts |
| 2. building relationships through sharing meals and socializing | ↔ | building relationships while doing tasks |
| 3. having an egalitarian organisational structure | ↔ | having a hierarchical organisational structure |
| 4. being strict about time | ↔ | being flexible with time |
| 5. being precise, speaking without hidden meaning | ↔ | speaking with hidden meaning |
| 6. being open to confrontation | ↔ | avoiding confrontation |
| 7. giving direct negative feedback | ↔ | giving indirect negative feedback |
| 8. teams having the final say | ↔ | individuals having the final say |

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4. Read the statements about where different cultures are placed on the scales and decide if they are true or false. Then, watch a [video](https://youtu.be/i92yIOSiBkc) [https://youtu.be/i92yIOSiBkc] (to 03:34) and check your answers. Correct false answers.

- A. French people often use a more softened approach to giving feedback, while Americans typically favour a direct style.
- B. The British would first explain the principles and then summarize the main points when trying to persuade.
- C. In Japan or Nigeria, there isn't a clear distinction between superiors and other employees.
- D. In Germany, decisions are made by teams and not only by bosses.
- E. In India, getting to know someone personally is really important to be sure you can rely on them.
- F. In the Netherlands, having arguments and discussions can harm relationships.
- G. When doing business with Italians, there shouldn't be any changes to deadlines.

5. Discuss the questions.

- Did any part of the video resonate with you and your experience of doing international business? Would you disagree with anything?
- Where would you put your country on some of the scales discussed in the video?
- If you could give one piece of advice to someone from a different culture coming to your country to do business, what would it be?
- Considering the eight scales, how would you describe your organisation's culture in terms of feedback, decision making, trust, etc.? Is it different from other companies you have worked in or are familiar with?
- Where would you place yourself on the scales? Are there any norms and behaviours you'd like to adopt, such as being more confrontational or giving more direct feedback? How would people in your own culture react to such changes?



6. Read the situations that might result from miscommunication in cross-cultural business relationships. Rewrite them using the phrases in brackets.

- A. Being used to having arguments and discussions to seek improvements, I criticised the new proposal in the meeting, only to realise that the Japanese team members interpreted my words as a personal attack. (open confrontation)

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- B. During a negotiation meeting in Saudi Arabia, the manager of an American company had to push harder to get further information, feeling uncomfortable with such an indirect way of communication. (explicit communication)
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- C. It was mainly because the Malaysian executive expressed his company's preferences through hints and suggestions that the Americans weren't sufficiently convinced, and decided not to close the deal in the end. (subtle tactic)
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- D. While trying to avoid being harsh with my feedback, I didn't effectively communicate the necessary improvements to my French colleague, which led to no action being taken. (blunt criticism).
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- E. I was surprised, almost shocked, when the new Brazilian manager communicated the decisions without getting the team involved in any kind of discussion. (common consensus)
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- F. As the project's due date was approaching, Mr Hofmann grew frustrated with his Spanish colleague's flexible approach to time, which certainly differed from the German's expectation for punctuality. (looming deadline)
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7. Look at the situations in ex. 6 again and discuss the points below.

- whether you've experienced/heard of similar situations
- whether you've had experience working with the countries/cultures in ex. 6
- other issues in business cross-cultural communication you've had to deal with
- what could have been done in the situations to prevent miscommunication
- whether trust-building practices such as social events or informal meetings could be useful to prevent miscommunication