

Culture and the workplace:
What is culture?

Firstly, what do think **culture** is?

Culture has been defined as: the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

The category or group can pertain to any *geographic* entity, *gender*, *age*, *class*, *occupation*, *industry* or even just within a *small family*:

Layers of culture

- As almost everyone belongs to a number of different groups and categories of people at the same time, people unavoidably carry several layers of mental programming within themselves, corresponding to different levels of culture.

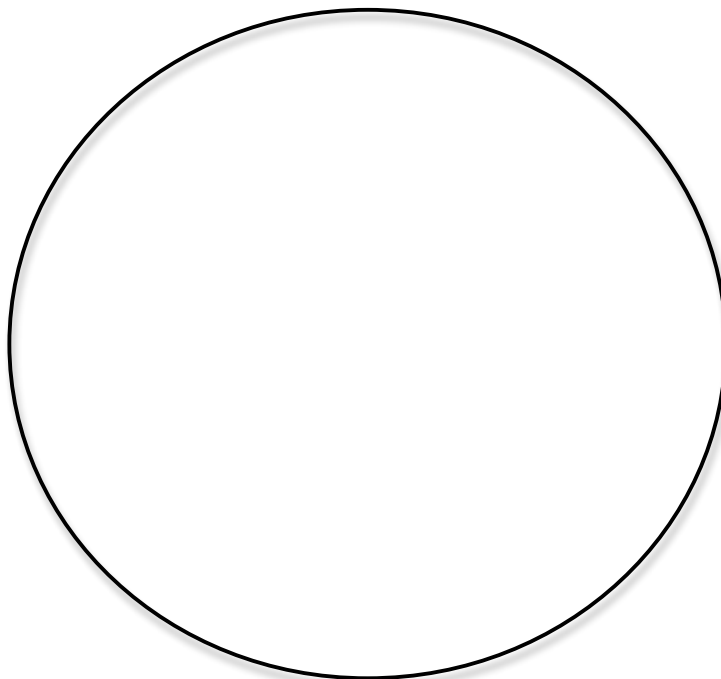
For example:

- At **n**_____ **I** level according to one's country (or countries for people who migrated during their lifetime);
- At **re**_____ **I** and/or **et**_____ and/or **rel**_____ and/or **linguistic** affiliation level, as most nations are composed of culturally different regions and/ or ethnic and/or religious and/or language groups;
- At **ge**_____ level, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy;
- At **ge**_____ level, which separates grandparents from parents from children;
- At **social class** level, associated with educational opportunities and with a person's **occ**_____ or **profession**;
- For those who are employed, an **or**_____ **I** or **corporate** level according to the way employees have been socialized by their work organization.

What **groups** do you belong to?

We distinguish our groups by **ins** _____ **s** and **outs** _____ **s**

- We draw a mental line around those we consider to be in **our group**, people within our **moral circle**... they then have full rights and obligations. Often the perception of threat creates ever-smaller circles.
 - CONSIDER when you meet new people..... *how do you react?*
 - For Carl, I am **English** (group) when I am in the UK (threat from Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish)
 - **British** when I am in Europe (I align with my Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish countrymen)
 - **European** when in different continents (I then align with my fellow Europeans)



Who's in your circle?

Culture is a **collective phenomenon**, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned.

Culture is **learned**, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes.

Homeostasis: parents tend to reproduce the education they received, whether they want to or not. Culture reproduces itself...

Consider what habits, manners, and customs you have learned from your **parents** and **grandparents**: can you name them?

Consider what habits, manners, and customs you have learned from your **friends** and **teachers**: can you name them?

What is Culture?

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of *knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions* acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people.

Culture is communication, communication is culture.

Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated *behavior*; that is the **totality** of a person's learned, **accumulated** experience, which is *socially transmitted*, or more briefly, behavior through social learning.

A **culture** is a **way of life** of a group of people - the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are **learned** and deliberately **perpetuated** in a society through its institutions.

Culture consists of **patterns**, *explicit* and *implicit*, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.

Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.

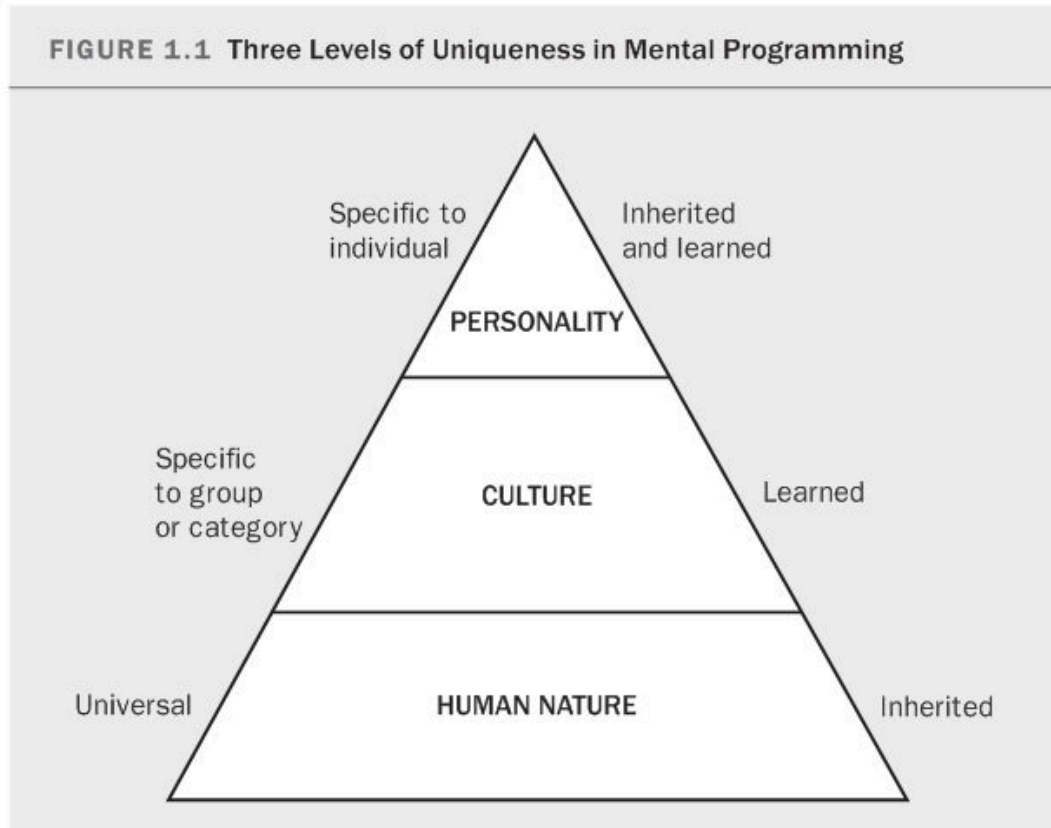
Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

There are many definitions of culture. It is really quite elusive.

Reference:

Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Culture should be distinguished from **human nature** on one side, and from an individual's personality on the other:



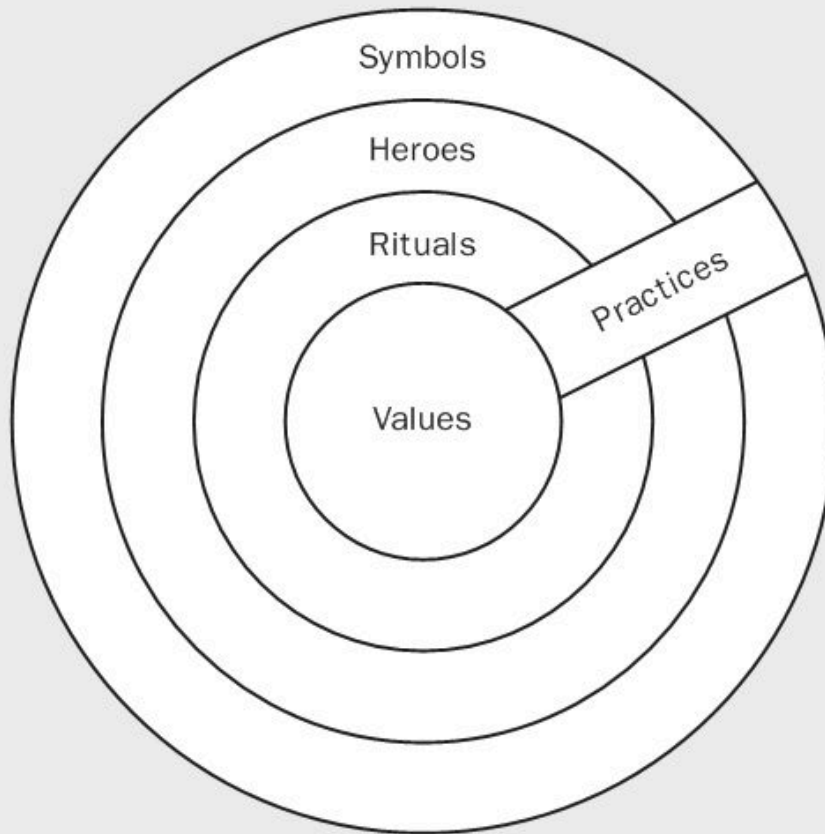
Human nature is inherited within our genes

- Physical and psychological functioning such as fear, anger, love, joy, sadness
- However, it is what one does with these feelings and how we express them can be influenced by culture

Personality – partly learned and partly inherited

- No other person has the same personality as us

FIGURE 1.2 The “Onion”: Manifestations of Culture at Different Levels of Depth



Symbols, heroes, rituals, and values:

- Cultural differences manifest themselves in several ways - **symbols**, **heroes**, **rituals**, and **values**.

Symbols are words, gestures, and pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning that is only recognized by those who share the culture. The words in a language or jargon belong to this category, as do dress, hairstyles, Coca-Cola and flags. New symbols are easily developed and old ones disappear.

What *Symbols* do Chinese people share?

Heroes are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics which are highly prized in a culture, and who thus serve as models for behaviour. Bill Gates, Chairman Mao, Winston Churchill, Snoopy in the USA, Asterix in France

What *Heroes* do Chinese people have?

Rituals are collective activities, technically superfluous (not required) in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered as **socially essential**: they are therefore carried out for their own sake. Ways of greeting and paying respect to others, social and religious ceremonies are examples. A way a language is used in text and talk, daily interactions, and communication

What rituals do Chinese have?

Symbols, heroes and rituals can be included under the term practices.

Symbols, heroes and rituals are **vi**_____ to an outside observer although their cultural meaning is **invisible**... it is only how **ins**_____ interpret them.

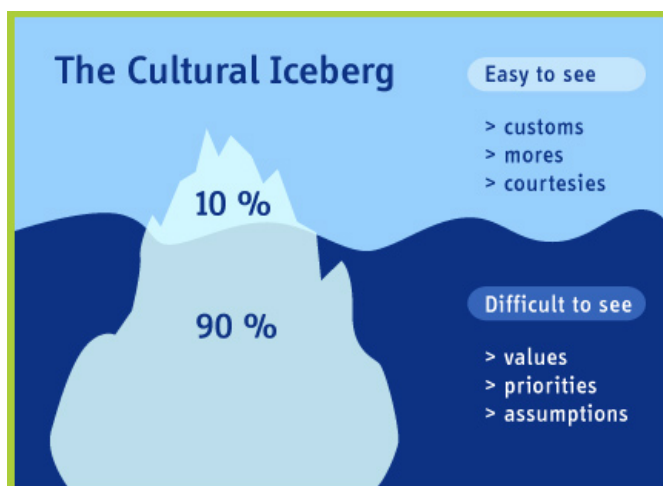
The **core of culture** is formed by *values*. **Values** are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others.

- Values are feelings with an arrow to it: they have a plus and a minus side.

For example, they deal with:

Values
Evil vs. Good
Dirty vs. Clean
Ugly vs. Beautiful
Unnatural vs. Natural
Abnormal vs. Normal
Paradoxical vs. Logical
Irrational vs. Rational

While we often think that we can **see** culture, culture **hides** more than it reveals and it hides it most effectively from its **own participants**. The **real challenge** is not to understand foreign cultures, but to understand one's own, to make what we take for granted stand out in perspective. This is the first step towards learning about culture.



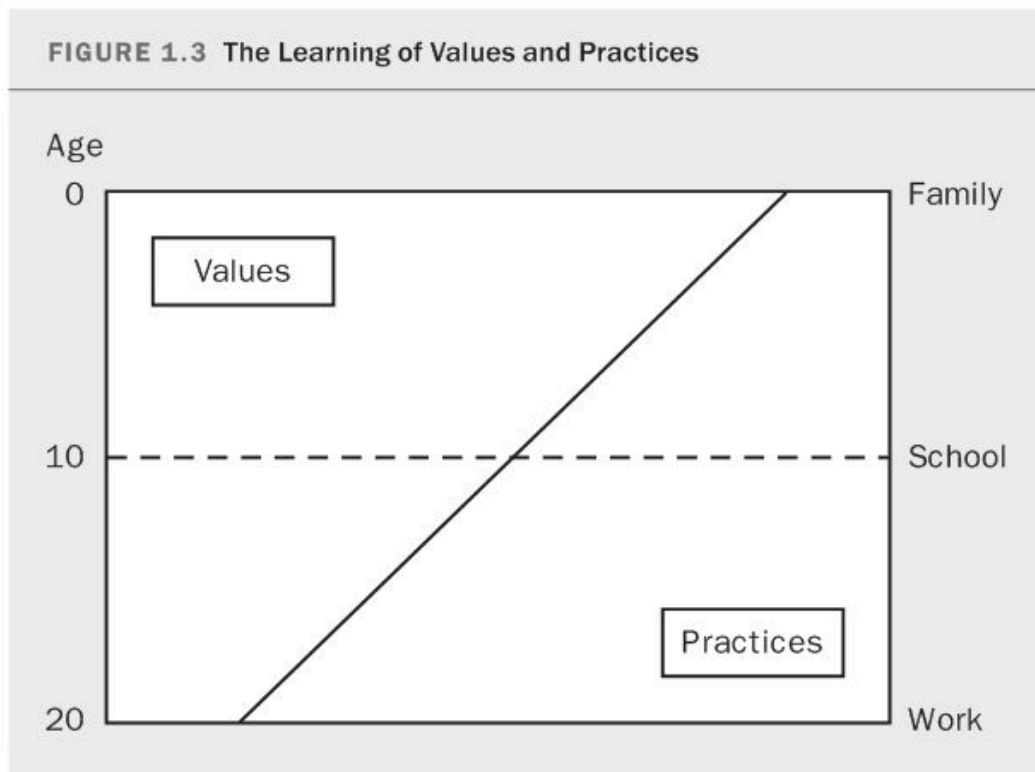
Values are among the first things **ch**_____ learn - not **consciously**, but implicitly. Development psychologists believe that by the **age of** _____, most children have their basic value system firmly in place, and after that age, changes are **difficult** to make.

Because they were acquired so early in our lives, many values remain **unc**_____ to those who *hold them*. We gradually switch to different, conscious ways of learning, focusing primarily on **new practices**.

Every person carries within him- or herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting that were learned throughout the person's lifetime.

Therefore they cannot be discussed, nor can outsiders directly observe them. They can only be inferred from the way people act under various circumstances.

This is how we learn our values and practices:



The basic problem areas correspond to dimensions that Hofstede named as:

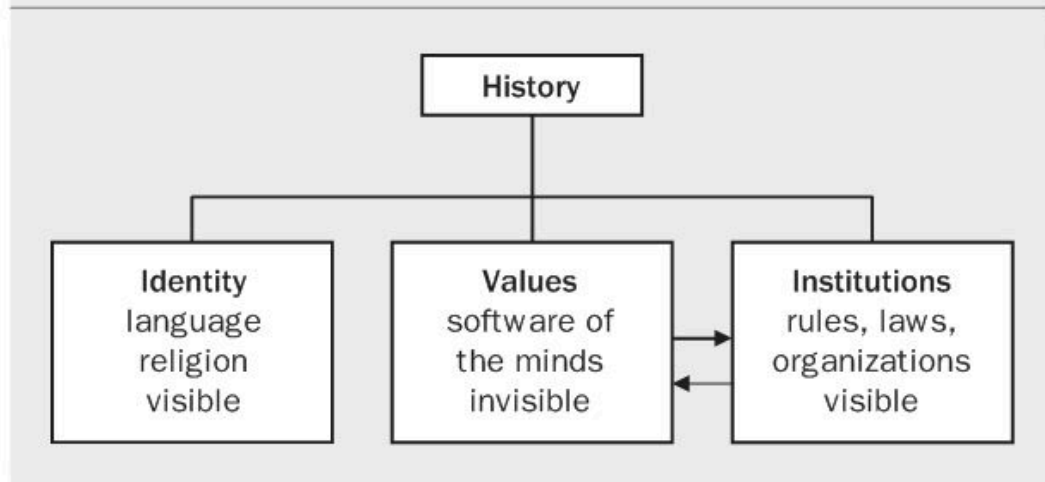
- *Power distance* (from small to large)
- *Collectivism versus individualism*,
- *Femininity versus masculinity*, and
- *Uncertainty Avoidance* (from weak to strong).

In the next few weeks, we will cover these areas in more detail to understand different cultures and the differences. You will learn about Chinese culture and foreign cultures and how to work with them. It has been suggested by Hofstede (perhaps the most well famous cultural expert): “the business of international business is culture”.

E G Hall argues that the “*human potential is strictly limited by an underdeveloped ability to get beyond culture in order to achieve a more creative, expansive and responsive use of our capacities to think and communicate (verbal and non-verbal) and resolve problems.*”

- Consider your case study group. You are **constrained** by your ability (as a group of a similar culture) to look beyond how you see the world (what we often call ‘groupthink’. If for example, you added me to your group, I would bring another culture to your team as well as understanding of work culture and HAT culture. Even just adding someone from another culture (*without expertise*) would offer something extra. It also would bring **conflict** due to our different perspectives (and then how we **resolve conflicts** is also **cultural**).

FIGURE 1.4 Sources of Differences Between Countries and Groups



Culture and the workplace:
Power Distance (PD)

One way that many cultures differ (and vary) is **'Power Distance'**.

Power Distance can be defined as the extent to which the *less powerful* members of **institutions** and **organizations** within a country **expect** and **accept** that power is distributed unequally.

'Institutions' are the basic elements of society like the *family, school, and the community*; **'organizations'** are the places where people work.

- This represents **inequality** (more versus less), but defined from **below**, not from **above**.
- It suggests that a society's level of inequality is **endorsed** (allowed, approved) by the **followers** as much as by the **leaders**.
- **Power** and **inequality**, of course, are extremely fundamental facts of any *society* and *anybody* with some international experience will be aware that **'all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others'**. – Geert Hofstede

When working in international companies or studying abroad, it is important to know what kind of **Power Distance** the society has.

The question would be: 'is it **Small Power Distance** or **Large Power Distance** society?'

The goal in many Small Power Distance societies is to narrow it further.

Notes:

Let's look at the key difference between Small and Large-Power-Distance societies:

TABLE 3.3 Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power-Distance Societies

I: General Norm, Family, School, and Health Care

SMALL POWER DISTANCE	LARGE POWER DISTANCE
Inequalities among people should be minimized.	Inequalities among people are expected and desired.
Social relationships should be handled with care.	Status should be balanced with restraint.
Less powerful people and more powerful people should be interdependent.	Less powerful people should be dependent.
Less powerful people are emotionally comfortable with interdependence.	Less powerful people are emotionally polarized between dependence and counterdependence.
Parents treat children as equals.	Parents teach children obedience.
Children treat parents and older relatives as equals.	Respect for parents and older relatives is a basic and lifelong virtue.
Children play no role in old-age security of parents.	Children are a source of old-age security to parents.
Students treat teachers as equals.	Students give teachers respect, even outside class.
Teachers expect initiatives from students in class.	Teachers should take all initiatives in class.
Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths.	Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.
Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students.	Quality of learning depends on excellence of the teacher.
Less educated persons hold more authoritarian values than more educated persons.	More educated and less educated persons show equally authoritarian values.
Educational policy focuses on secondary schools.	Educational policy focuses on universities.
Patients treat doctors as equals and actively supply information.	Patients treat doctors as superiors; consultations are shorter and controlled by the doctor.

Firstly, what kind of **Power Distance** (small or large) do you think **China** has? Why do you think that?

Secondly, what kind of **Power Distance** do you think **Great Britain** (and most Anglo cultures) has?

Considering the above, with **you** as a **student** and **Carl** as a **teacher**, does it **now** make sense why I **behave** and **act** like I do? Can you think of an example (from our classes) that represents this? (be honest 😊)

If you want to study abroad, what are the important points to know from above?

Notes:

Here's how **Power Distance** affects the workplace:

TABLE 3.4 Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power-Distance Societies
II: The Workplace

SMALL POWER DISTANCE	LARGE POWER DISTANCE
Hierarchy in organizations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience.	Hierarchy in organizations reflects existential inequality between higher and lower levels.
Decentralization is popular.	Centralization is popular.
There are fewer supervisory personnel.	There are more supervisory personnel.
There is a narrow salary range between the top and the bottom of the organization.	There is a wide salary range between the top and the bottom of the organization.
Managers rely on their own experience and on subordinates.	Managers rely on superiors and on formal rules.
Subordinates expect to be consulted.	Subordinates expect to be told what to do.
The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat.	The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat, or "good father."
Subordinate-superior relations are pragmatic.	Subordinate-superior relations are emotional.
Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon.	Privileges and status symbols are normal and popular.
Manual work has the same status as office work.	White-collar jobs are valued more than blue-collar jobs.

III: The State and Ideas**SMALL POWER DISTANCE**

The use of power should be legitimate and follow criteria of good and evil.

Skills, wealth, power, and status need not go together.

Mostly wealthier countries with a large middle class.

All should have equal rights.

Power is based on formal position, expertise, and ability to give rewards.

The way to change a political system is by changing the rules (evolution).

There is more dialogue and less violence in domestic politics.

Pluralist governments based on the outcome of majority votes.

The political spectrum shows a strong center and weak right and left wings.

There are small income differentials in society, further reduced by the tax system.

Scandals end political careers of those involved.

Participative theories of management: Christian New Testament, Marx.

LARGE POWER DISTANCE

Might prevails over right: whoever holds the power is right and good.

Skills, wealth, power, and status should go together.

Mostly poorer countries with a small middle class.

The powerful should have privileges.

Power is based on tradition or family, charisma, and the ability to use force.

The way to change a political system is by changing the people at the top (revolution).

There is less dialogue and more violence in domestic politics.

Autocratic or oligarchic governments based on co-optation.

The political spectrum, if allowed to exist, has a weak center and strong right and left wings.

There are large income differentials in society, further increased by the tax system.

Scandals involving power holders are usually covered up.

Power-based practice of management: Confucius, Plato, Machiavelli.

Culture and the workplace:
Collectivism vs. Individualism (IDV)

Another important way that people and societies differ is whether they concentrate on the **individual** or more on the **collective** (group).

Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, **Collectivism**, that is the degree to which **individuals are integrated into groups**.

“**Individualistic**” cultures teach their people to be responsible for **thems**_____ and that, in a sense, the **wo**_____ **revolves around them**

- Their job is to become **independent** and to reap the rewards of their **individual** endeavours
- **Individual ach**_____ **t** is admired
- People should not be **emotionally dependent** on organizations or groups

By contrast, “**collectivistic**” cultures stress **gr**_____ interests over those of the **individual**

- They stress *personal relationships, achieving harmony* as an overriding **societal objective**
- The **central role of the fa**_____ in both personal and business affairs.
- One’s identity is difficult to **separate** from that of one’s group.
- **Gr**_____ decision-making is **preferred** and groups protect their members in exchange for unquestioned loyalty
- This is not to say that individuals are unimportant; they are. Rather, collectivistic cultures tend to believe that people can only attain their full potential as a **me**_____ of a strong group.

On the **individualist** side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are **loose**: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her **immediate** (near) family.

On the **collectivist** side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

The issue addressed by this dimension is an extremely fundamental one, regarding all societies in the world.

TABLE 4.2 Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies**I: General Norm and Family**

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
People are born into extended families or other in-groups that continue protecting them in exchange for loyalty.	Everyone grows up to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate (nuclear) family only.
Children learn to think in terms of "we."	Children learn to think in terms of "I."
Value standards differ for in-groups and out-groups: exclusionism.	The same value standards are supposed to apply to everyone: universalism.
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided.	Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.
Friendships are predetermined.	Friendships are voluntary and should be fostered.
Resources should be shared with relatives.	Individual ownership of resources, even for children.
Adult children live with parents.	Adult children leave the parental home.
High-context communication prevails.	Low-context communication prevails.
Frequent socialization in public places.	My home is my castle.
Trespasses lead to shame and loss of face for self and group.	Trespasses lead to guilt and loss of self-respect.
Brides should be young, industrious, and chaste; bridegrooms should be older.	Criteria for marriage partners are not predetermined.
The most powerful influence on girls' beauty ideals is girlfriends.	The most powerful influence on girls' beauty ideals is boys in general.

Individualistic	Collectivistic
Person-centered approach valued; primary loyalty to oneself.	Group-centered approach valued; primary loyalty to the group.
Preference for preserving individual rights over social harmony.	Preference for preserving social harmony over individual rights.
Belief that people achieve self-identity through individual accomplishment.	Belief that people achieve self-identity through group membership.
Focus on accomplishing individual goals.	Focus on accomplishing group goals.
Sanctions reinforce independence and personal responsibility.	Sanctions reinforce conformity to group norms.
Contract-based agreements.	Relationship-based agreements.
Tendency toward low-context (direct, frank) communication.	Tendency toward high-context (subtle, indirect) communication.
Tendency toward individual decision-making.	Tendency toward group or participative decision-making.

Considering the above, is Chinese society more **Individualist** or **Collectivist**? Why do you think that?

Considering the above, do you think British (and Anglo) society is **Individualist** or **Collectivist**? Why do you think that?

Do you believe that people should **speak their mind** (be candid) or should try to keep harmony by **not** expressing their opinion openly?

Is there anything in the above that you **disagree with** in terms of Chinese society (culture) or wish it was different?

TABLE 4.3 Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies**II: Language, Personality, and Behavior**

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
Use of the word "I" is avoided.	Use of the word "I" is encouraged.
Interdependent self	Independent self
On personality tests, people score more introvert.	On personality tests, people score more extravert.
Showing sadness is encouraged, and happiness discouraged.	Showing happiness is encouraged, and sadness discouraged.
Slower walking speed	Faster walking speed
Consumption patterns show dependence on others.	Consumption patterns show self-supporting lifestyles.
Social network is primary source of information.	Media is primary source of information.
A smaller share of both private and public income is spent on health care.	A larger share of both private and public income is spent on health care.
People with disabilities are a shame on the family and should be kept out of sight.	People with disabilities should participate as much as possible in normal life.

Is there anything in the above that you disagree with in terms of **Collectivist** society?

**TABLE 4.4 Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies
III: School, Workplace, and ICT**

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
Students speak up in class only when sanctioned by the group.	Students are expected to individually speak up in class.
The purpose of education is learning how to do.	The purpose of education is learning how to learn.
Diplomas provide entry to higher-status groups.	Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.
Occupational mobility is lower.	Occupational mobility is higher.
Employees are members of in-groups who will pursue the in-group's interest.	Employees are "economic persons" who will pursue the employer's interest if it coincides with their self-interest.
Hiring and promotion decisions take employee's in-group into account.	Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.
The employer-employee relationship is basically moral, like a family link.	The employer-employee relationship is a contract between parties in a labor market.
Management is management of groups.	Management is management of individuals.
Direct appraisal of subordinates spoils harmony.	Management training teaches the honest sharing of feelings.
In-group customers get better treatment (<i>particularism</i>).	Every customer should get the same treatment (<i>universalism</i>).
Relationship prevails over task.	Task prevails over relationship.
The Internet and e-mail are less attractive and less frequently used.	The Internet and e-mail hold strong appeal and are frequently used to link individuals.

As we see above in respect to learning, what do you think **learning how to learn** means? Do you agree that this idea is a good idea or not?

Is harmony very important? Does it prevent things from being done/achieved?

If you were my boss (Carl), what challenges do you think you would have in managing me?

Notes:

**TABLE 4.5 Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies
IV: Politics and Ideas**

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
Opinions are predetermined by group membership.	Everyone is expected to have a private opinion.
Collective interests prevail over individual interests.	Individual interests prevail over collective interests.
State has dominant role in the economic system.	State has restrained role in the economic system.
Low per capita GNI	High per capita GNI
Companies are owned by families or collectives.	Joint-stock companies are owned by individual investors.
Private life is invaded by group(s).	Everyone has a right to privacy.
Laws and rights differ by group.	Laws and rights are supposed to be the same for all.
Lower Human Rights rating	Higher Human Rights rating
Ideologies of equality prevail over ideologies of individual freedom.	Ideologies of individual freedom prevail over ideologies of equality.
Imported economic theories are unable to deal with collective and particularist interests.	Native economic theories are based on pursuit of individual self-interests.
Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goals.	Self-actualization by every individual is an ultimate goal.
Patriotism is the ideal.	Autonomy is the ideal.
Outcome of psychological experiments depends on in-group–out-group distinction	Outcome of psychological experiments depends on ego-other distinction.

Culture and the workplace:

High-Low Context cultures
Concepts of Time and Space

Introduction:

This worksheet will talk about communication from a cultural perspective, as this is one of the most challenging things when dealing people from other cultures. It is not just about the actual language, it is **h_____ people communicate** that is important.

Then we will also discuss the idea of **sp_____** and **ti_____**, as it is central to life and understanding. Cultures have very different ideas of **sp_____** and **ti_____** and it affects the workplace immensely.

High-Low Context cultures

We have **High Context** cultures and **Low Context** cultures

High Context refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over a long period of time.

- Many aspects of cultural behaviour are **not made ex_____** because most members know **what to do** and **what to think** from **years of inter_____** with each other. Your family is probably a good example of a high context environment.

Low Context refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but of *shorter* duration or for some specific reason.

- In these societies, cultural behaviour and beliefs may need to be **spelled out explicitly** so that those coming into the cultural environment know how to behave.

Translate the words **EXPLICIT** and **IMPLICIT** into Chinese?

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High Context

- **L**_____ verbally explicit communication, less **written/formal** information
- More **internalized** understandings of what is communicated
- Long term relationships
- Strong boundaries- who is accepted as **belonging** vs. who is considered an **"outsider"**
- Knowledge is **situational, rel**_____.
- Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority.

Low Context

- **R**_____ oriented, people play by external rules
- More knowledge is **codified, public, external, and accessible**.
- Sequencing: **separation**-of time, of space, of activities, of relationships
- More interpersonal connections of shorter duration
- Knowledge is more often **transferable**
- **Task-centered**. Decisions and activities focus around what **needs** to be done, division of responsibilities.

The Structure of Relationships

- **High context:** Dense, intersecting networks and long-term relationships, strong boundaries, relationship more important than task
- **Low context:** Loose, wide networks, shorter term, compartmentalized relationships, task more important than relationship

Can you guess which context Chinese society is?

Can you guess which context British society is?

What challenges do you think this brings when we have a class?

An example: a meeting

In China communication tends to be **very efficient** because of their information-flow at work and in privacy. They discuss everything in advance and consider meetings as an official “**ceremony**” where the already commonly agreed decision will be announced. This is important in the way of “giving and keeping face”. The Americans and Germans in contrast inform the participating attendants in a meeting about the hard and necessary facts. The decision-making process takes place within the **meeting**. To French people, it is similar with their Asian counterparts. They are also well informed before they meet each other. Many explicit and detailed discussions would probably seen as an insult because everything is already clear.

High-context means that “most of the information is either in the physical context or initialized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.” In comparison to the meaning of **low-context communication** is “the mass of information is vested in the explicit code. It is said that ‘**words are everything**’ to many Anglo and European cultures.

To understand what someone really meant in a conversation and to avoid misunderstandings it is important to realize “**how**” it was said. In high-context systems people expect from their interlocutor that he or she knows what the message of the communication was. This can be done without that it was specifically told. Chinese and French use a high-context communication. They place great importance on **ambience, decorum, the relative status of the participants in a communication** and the manner of message’s delivery. In France it might be hard to feel **fully accepted for outsiders** within their culture because of their big diffuse connections. In comparison members of **individualistic cultures** using **low-context communication** like *Germans, Americans and Finns* sometimes ignore those differences from high-context countries cultures. In case of a meeting where those countries from low- and high-context cultures would have to work and discuss, the French and especially the Chinese would not interact and express their **disagreement** or **reservations**. For Chinese issues, **circumstances** and **relationships** are as important as work so they would comment only in a more private or appropriate occasion.

Chinese people tend to be reserved which is considered as **active behaviour** in **collectivistic** cultures. They first need to build up an **interpersonal relationship** –

a foundation where it is possible to find the right level of context. In contrast low-context cultures they **argue** about each other's opinion within the decision-making process and take discussions in their own hands to come to an agreement. Within this process members of low-context tend to be **precise** and provide just the **required information** and in case of silence, it has to be filled. But this is just a generic statement. In contrast the Finns regards to silence have a different cultural behaviour. Silence is seen as polite and doesn't have to be replaced with communication. In this point they differ immensely from the Americans who are seen as the **characteristic low-context** country. They need to know what is **going on** and have to be provided with **detailed background information**. Information is freely available in an American company.

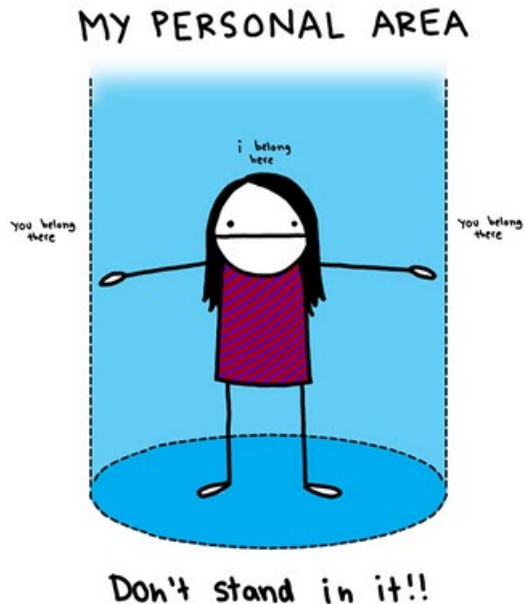
In contrast the Germans try to **hide information**, which is sacrificed even within a company or department. French are a high-context culture. They assume that the listener knows everything. It can happen that the *"French will think the Americans think they are stupid because they start explaining everything, and vice versa"*

When dealing with different people from high- and low-context cultures you always have to be aware of your interlocutor's cultural origin. This helps to avoid misunderstandings and creates a better basis for further discussions.



Space concept

(Spatial)

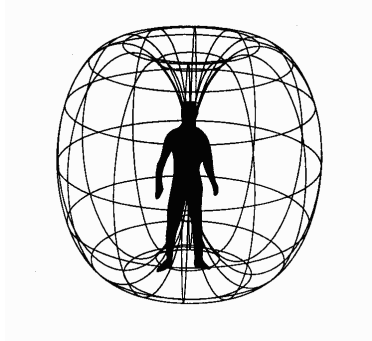


- Every human being has his/her own **dem**_____ for **sp**_____ to protect his/her cover from external influences of the environment. To create, find and define this boundary between oneself and the outside is **essential**.
- Especially important is it to know or at least to estimate someone's boundary/skin correctly. It can have big influence in **daily** and **business life** when dealing with **strangers** and **members** of **other** cultures whose **definition**

of and **treating** with space might be **unknown**. There are different points when characterizing space. One point is that people trace out their own territories, which they will **protect** and **defend** if necessary. This point, which is influenced by someone's cultural origin, is well developed in Germany and USA.

- Americans have distinctive places that they call "**mine**" and don't want them to be "**disturbed**". Germans may have an **even stronger** feeling about their territories. Personal things especially like their cars should rather be avoided to be "touched" **without permission** or **treated differently** from that like the owner would treat it.
- The same counts for **houses, grounds** and **offices**. They **shouldn't** be **accessed** without a detailed/explicit allowance. The size and location of offices are also both considered as very important because they express some kind of status and power. Like a corner office or one without walls. But the power symbol has a higher value in Germany than in USA.
- Whereas in France the top management of a company is commonly placed in the **middle of the building** – corresponding to their way of doing something – "**everything**" has to be centralized. The central position is a key position in France because all information and decisions can be controlled from the **central point**.

- Like already mentioned there are different categories of space. The other one is **personal space**, which is another form of territory.
- First **personal space is dependent on the relationship people have**, their emotions and cultural background. Every culture and more precisely every individual has its own demand of personal space.
 - This can be described as a '**bubble**', which defines the personal boundary, is needed to feel comfortable in interacting with people. This bubble can be penetrated from others but just when fulfilling the "invisible" requirements like already mentioned – a good relationship.



- In France, Spain, Italy this **bubble** is rather **small** compared to *Germany, USA* and *Finland*. It is not seen as penetration when French people **kissing each other** when greeting someone.
- The **bubble** in Germany, USA and Finland is rather **big** and it is an attack to a person's space/personal territory when kissing or touching someone without "agreement":
 - The **distance** between people should be kept and will be dissolved by shaking hands only.
 - It is perceived as impolite and very rude when not keeping the distance between you and your interlocutor.
- In **China** an even greater demand of space is the norm. Nowadays of course there are strong western cultural influences and shaking hands is nothing unusual. But old and very traditional people in business may appreciate a bigger physical distance when greeting each other by bowing the head.
- It has to be figured out very carefully how space is handled and perceived as correct behaviour. Not paying attention to that can cause an immediate loss of your business relation because of attacking and not respecting someone's demand of space.

Time concept

The **importance of time** is dependent on the different viewpoints of people's origin respective of culture. "**Time is one of the fundamental bases on which all cultures rest and around all activities revolve**". The handling of time is one of the key elements of culture. Each culture has a different perspective on time.

There are differences how **cultures handle time**. In earlier times time was measured in seasons, darkness and daylight. Nowadays time is more **important** and **complex** than in the past.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck identified three types of culture:

- (1) **Present orientated**, with little attention to what has happened in past and what the future will bring. Past is considered as unimportant while future is seen as vague and unpredictable;
- (2) **Past-orientated** cultures have a high sense on traditions like to their ancestors, family, traditionalism and aristocracy. The present is attempted to be maintained;
- (3) **Future-orientated** cultures with a high value in changes have a more desirable development in economic and social scales.

For companies time is considered as an **endless challenge** they have to compete with and find solutions to the time management problem. There is also a cultural difference in how they deal with time:

- In some cultures, **appointments** are not necessary or to be precisely on time for appointments.
- Sometimes delays in appointments are **expected, tolerated** or at least taken into account.
 - But in Germany, Finland, USA and China **time** has a **high value** and has to be precisely organized to keep business running. Any delay or disturbance in time- (managing) will influence the whole schedule of a manager. It might be helpful for the waiting person to get informed about any delay.
 - In France it is similar but punctuality depends on the **importance of the person**. If the delay is not more than 15 minutes, it is acceptable to wait.

The role of **Time** can be important to organisations as it relates to **opportunity**. Some people say that **timing** in business is just as important as anything else. Having the *right* product at the **right** time is a fundamentally better than having the *right* product at the **wrong** time. As managers, we seek 'windows of opportunity' in the market and they are related to time.

- We also consider the learning process and timeframe for it
- Generally, the concept of time is **subjective** (despite being measured)
- Time pressure from internal and external factors
- How employees perceive time
- Business and product 'Life cycles'

Side reading:

- The Americans see a very small overlap between present and past but an increasing importance from past to highest the future. **Americans** are used to working if necessary **70 hours a week** just to reach their targets as fast as possible to increase the chances in the competition for jobs and hierarchies. But they forget sometimes to care about their health like other cultures that value time to a very high degree. Time pressure can cause stress and if it becomes "**negative stress**" – that's stress, which is overwhelming and can't be managed – people get **sick** and **unproductive**.
- A similar behaviour is reflected in German culture. Germans' most important attitude seems to be **always punctual**. Everything else than being on time is an insult for the waiting person and a shame for the person who keeps waiting. **Time** is considered as **very rare** and **expensive**. That's why time has to be well/perfectly organized. **Finns** and **Germans** consider time nearly in the same way. They have a big emphasize on present, which is clearly linked with the past and future in similar proportions. France instead emphasizes the past and their long history most. Present is also well related with past and future but with less value/importance on future. In China present, past and future are seen as independent not overlapping periods with the same amount of importance.



Finally, we have **monochronicism** and **polychronicism** cultures.

Polychronicity is a term that describes people who prefer to work on **multiple activities** at the **same time**. Examples of **polychronic** behaviours include browsing the Internet while driving a car and talking on the phone while sitting in meetings (or on bikes as we see in China). **Polychronicity** is in contrast to those who prefer **monochronicity** (doing **one** thing at a time). Edward Hall first developed the polychronic-monochronic concept in 1959 in his anthropological studies of time use in different cultures.

Mono- meaning one

Poly- meaning many

Which do you think China is?

What do you think Great Britain is?

Polychronic Attitude Index (PAI) developed by Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist in 1991, which is a 4-item scale measuring individual preference for polychronicity:

- (1) *I do not like to juggle several activities at the same time.*
- (2) *People should not try to do many things at once.*
- (3) *When I sit down at my desk, I work on one project at a time.*
- (4) *I am comfortable doing several things at the same time.*

Answer the above statements as to whether you **agree** or **disagree** with them (A/D)

Monochronic culture runs the Western World. That's not to say that everyone is a monochronic - far from it. But **life**, **work** and **society** are organized according to **monochronic** principles. Activities are **structured** and **scheduled** in a linear fashion, based on **clarity** of purpose, **efficiency** of execution and economic progress. **Logic**, **order**, **punctuality** and **productivity** define the mindset in which being and knowing serve doing and having.

Polychronic cultures tend to be more fluid and **less** structured. Relationships, alternatives, opportunities and mood take **precedence**. Having several projects running at the same time (multi-tasking) is both *natural* and *stimulating*, and people put it before

punctuality. Many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America are considered to be **polychronic**.

Monochronic People	Polychronic People
Tend to do one thing at a time	Do several things at the same time
Are not easily distracted	Are susceptible to distractions
Commit to work	Commit to relationships
Place importance on deadlines	Place less importance on deadlines
Stick to plans	Change plans often and easily
Value and respect privacy	Value connection
Relate punctuality to reputation	Relate punctuality to the relationship
Accept short term relationships	Lean towards life time relationships