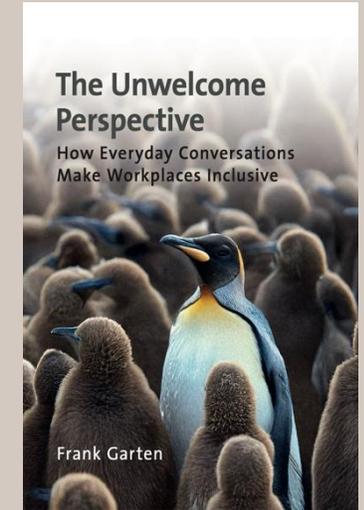
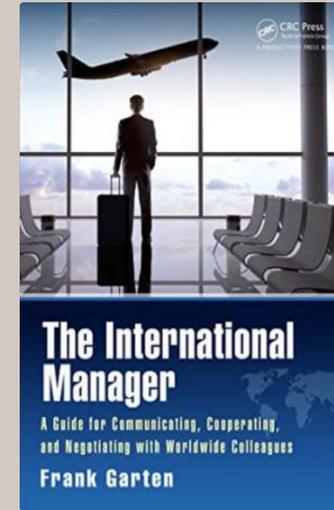
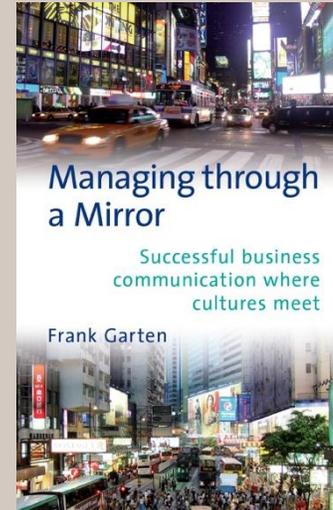




Navigating Cultural Differences
International Business

Frank Garten – March 16th, 2026





- PhD in Physics & Chemistry
- From Engineering to Marketing
- From Marketing to General Manager
- From General Manager to HR
- Leadership Development
- Culture -> Inclusion -> Conflict resolution

NAVIGATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES



Do we value the difference in age, rank, background or upbringing?

Or do we ignore it?



Do we value a quick and efficient introduction with a clear agenda?

Or do we focus on the person?



Do we speak diplomatic, avoid confrontation and discuss things in harmony?

Or are we Dutch?





THINK ABOUT THIS SITUATION:

You agree to meet a friend at their home for drinks at 20.00 hrs. What time is it acceptable in your culture to arrive there?

- A. Between 19:59:59 and 20:00:01
- B. Between 19:45 and 20:00
- C. Between 20:00 and 20:15
- D. Any time between 20.00 and 21.00
- E. Any time whatsoever





Was your answer a result of

- A. Your country culture
- B. Your company culture
- C. Your professional culture
- D. Your family culture
- E. Your personality
- F. Your personal choice

SCHEDULING



planning accurately



responding flexibly

?

← LINEAR-TIME

→ FLEXIBLE-TIME

Japan
France
UK
Spain
Germany

POLL 2

SCHEDULING



planning accurately



responding flexibly

← LINEAR-TIME

FLEXIBLE-TIME →

Switzerland
Germany

Sweden
Japan

Netherlands
Norway
Finland
Czech
US
Denmark
Singapore
Australia

Belgium
UK
Canada
New Zealand
Ireland

Poland

France

Italy
Russia
Korea
Israel
Spain
UAE
Greece

Turkey
Brazil
Argentina
Chile

China
India
Philippines
Saudi Arabia

African
continent

NOT NORMAL

PECULIAR

RIDICULOUS

STRANGE

OBNOXIOUS

Different = Weird

NOT OK....

BIZARRE....

CLEARLY NUTS....

ODD....

CLEARLY NUTS....



In Japan, those who arrive early park further away from their workplace to allow those who arrive late to make it on time, showing mutual understanding

Chaos in Germany



The power of stereotypes

- Bring structure
- Understand experiences
- They are fun!

The danger of stereotypes

- Can't predict human behavior
- Dehumanizing experiences
- They do not bring understanding



30 People going for lunch



30 People going for lunch

Hell is:

- where the British are cooks...
- the Germans police...
- the lovers Swiss...
- and the Italians organise everything.

Heaven is:

- where the cooks are French...
- the police British...
- the lovers Italian...
- and the Germans organise everything.



Cultural Dimensions



Power distance

Equals, or existentially different?



Collectivism

Do we stand out, or do we fit in?



Relationship-orientation

Don't take it personal, or should you?



Uncertainty avoidance

Is flexibility the same as chaos?



Time-orientation

It's time, vs. it's the right time



Communicate with context

What you say vs. what you mean to say



TASK OR RELATIONSHIP



Let's get to work

vs.

Let's get to know each other

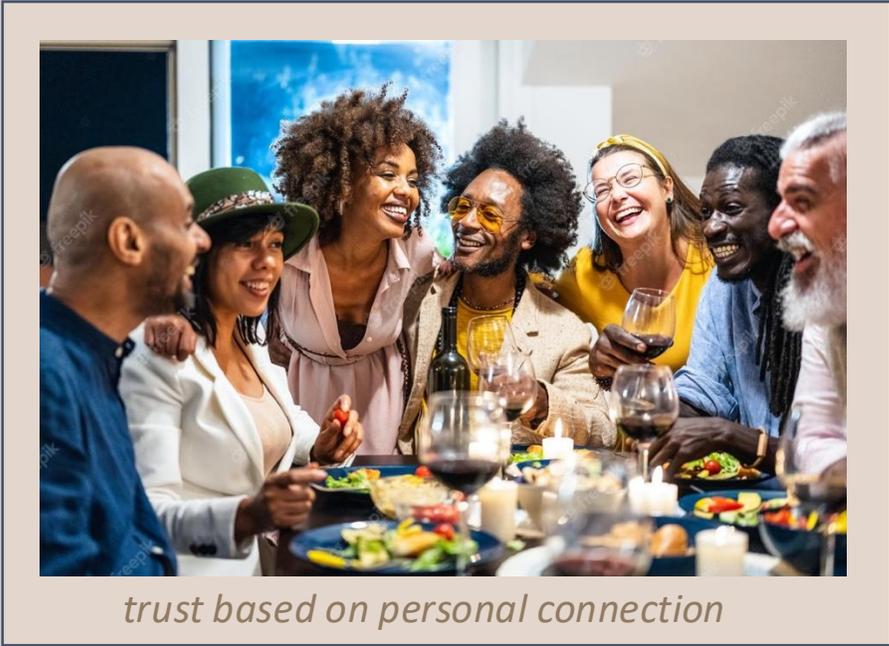
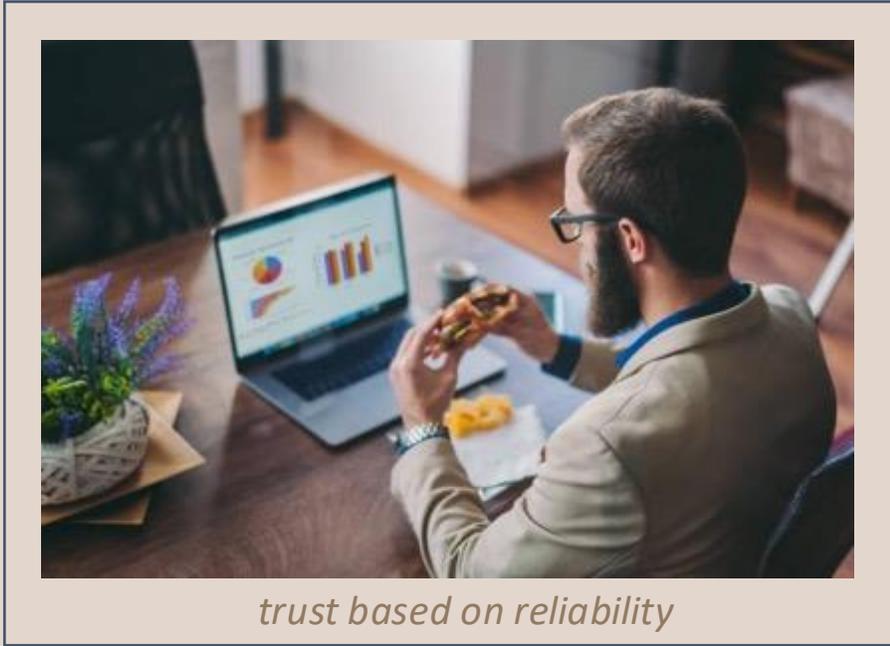


In **Task-based** cultures, business is transactional and does not rely on personal trust. Trust is not a condition to do business.



In **Relationship-based** cultures, personal trust between partners needs to be built up first before business can be taken up.

TRUSTING



?

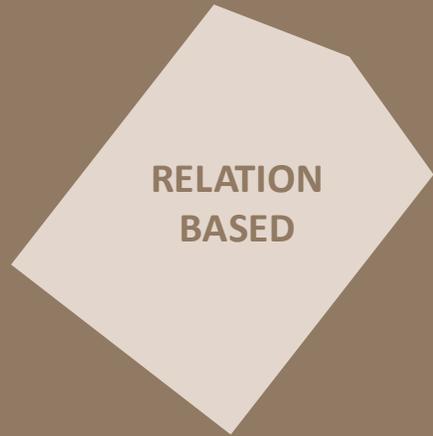
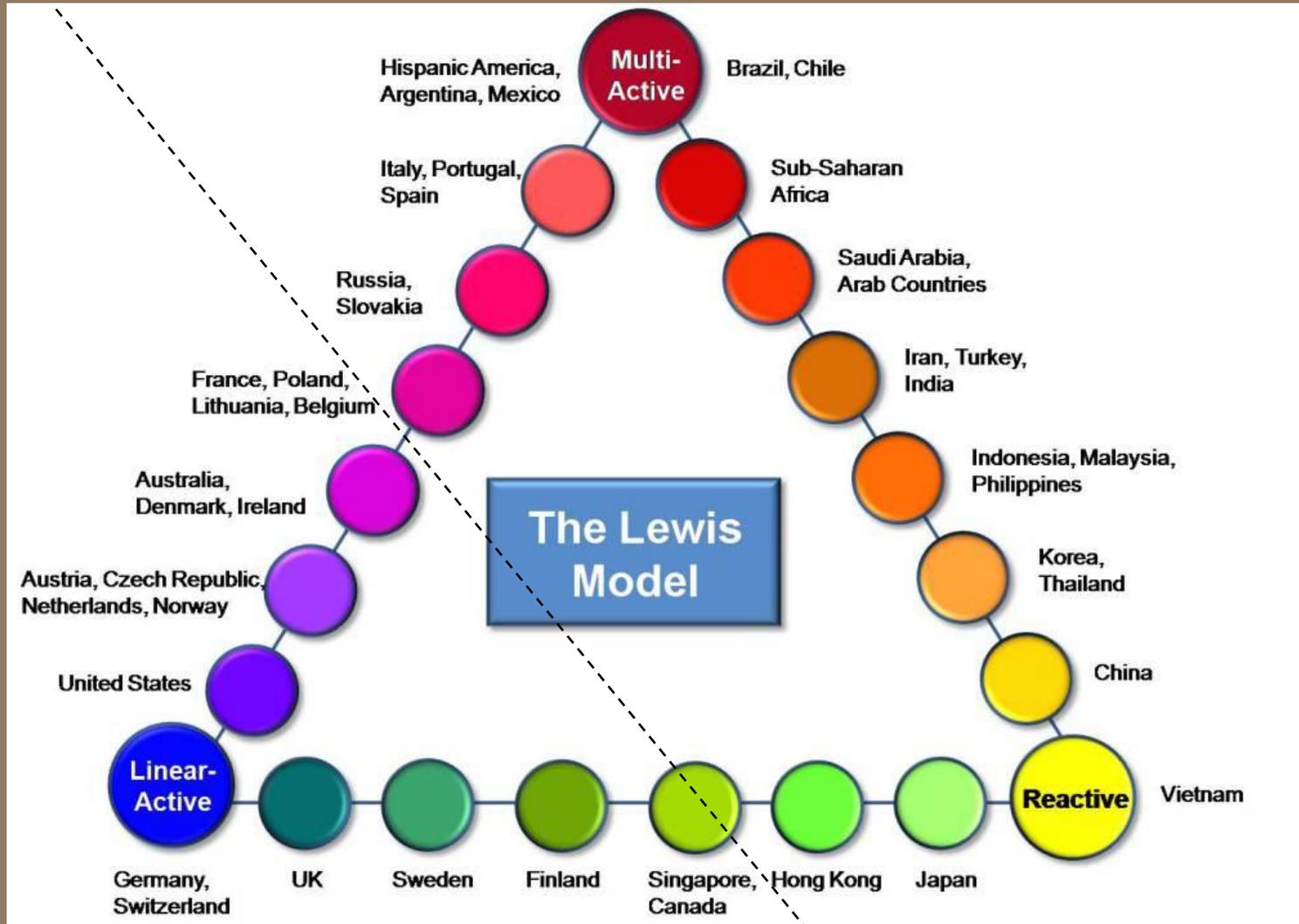
TASK-BASED ←

→ RELATIONSHIP-BASED

- United States
- China
- Finland
- France
- Portugal

POLL 4

- Fixed agendas
- Hard deadlines
- Contracts

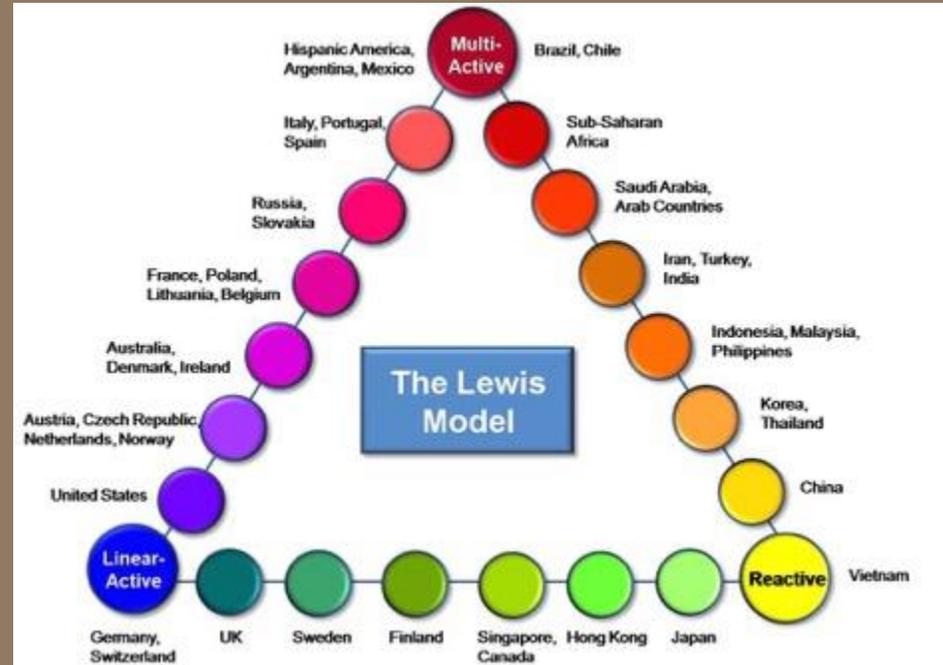


- Flexibility
- Fluid deadlines
- Oral agreements

BUILDING UP BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Mediterranean business connections

- Pitch connects people with personal stories and feelings
- Customer satisfaction driven by personal gestures
- Business deals are awarded to people
- Oral agreements



Anglo-Saxon business connections

- Pitch is focused on facts and data about business
- Customer satisfaction driven by good processes
- Business deals are awarded to organisations
- Written agreements

Asian business connections

- Pitch is targeted at connections in personal networks
- Customer satisfaction driven by helping each other
- Business deals are awarded to networks
- Oral agreements

IF YOU COME FROM TASK-BASED



IF YOU COME FROM RELATIONSHIP-BASED

SPEND INFORMAL TIME TO GET TO KNOW OTHERS

TWO EMAILS: FORMAL AND INFORMAL ONE

SAFT...

EVERYTHING IS PERSONAL

THEY EXPECT HELP FROM A PERSONAL CONNECTION

JOIN IN INFORMAL ACTIVITIES (DINNER, KARAOKE, ETC.)

GET TO THE POINT: THEY BUILD RELATIONS WHILE WORKING

SET AN AGENDA. EXPLAIN THE PROCESS

SAFT DOES NOT WORK... THEY RELY ON FORMAL MEETINGS

ATTACKS ARE DIRECTED AT CONTENT, NOT PERSON

THEY HAVE TO FOLLOW PROCESSES AND AGREEMENTS

REALISE THEY ARE EFFICIENCY-DRIVEN: LUNCH IS INCONVENIENT



POWER DISTANCE & HIERARCHY

Everybody speaks up

vs.

Everybody waits for
the highest in rank

POWER DISTANCE AND DECISION MAKING

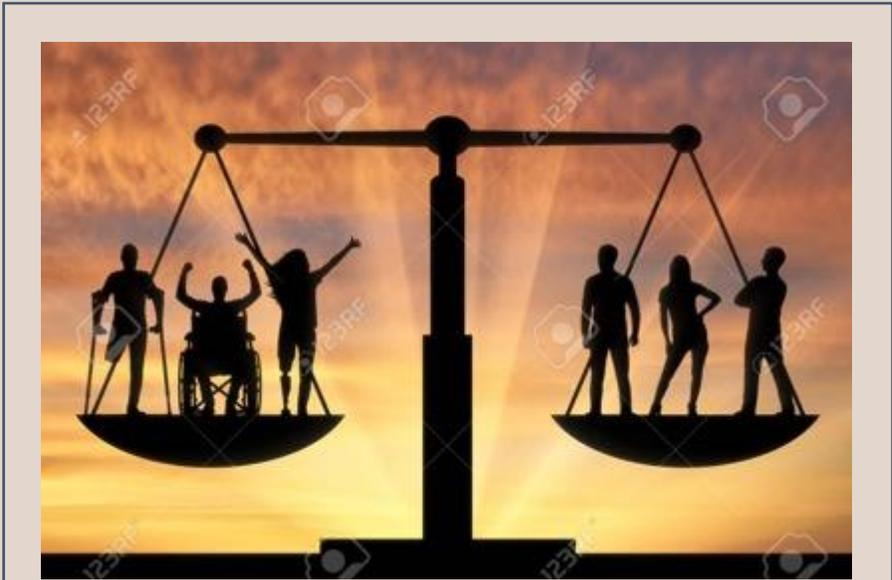


LOW POWER DISTANCE
INEQUALITY IS NOT DESIRABLE



HIGH POWER DISTANCE
INEQUALITY IS NATURAL

LEADING



we're all equals

?

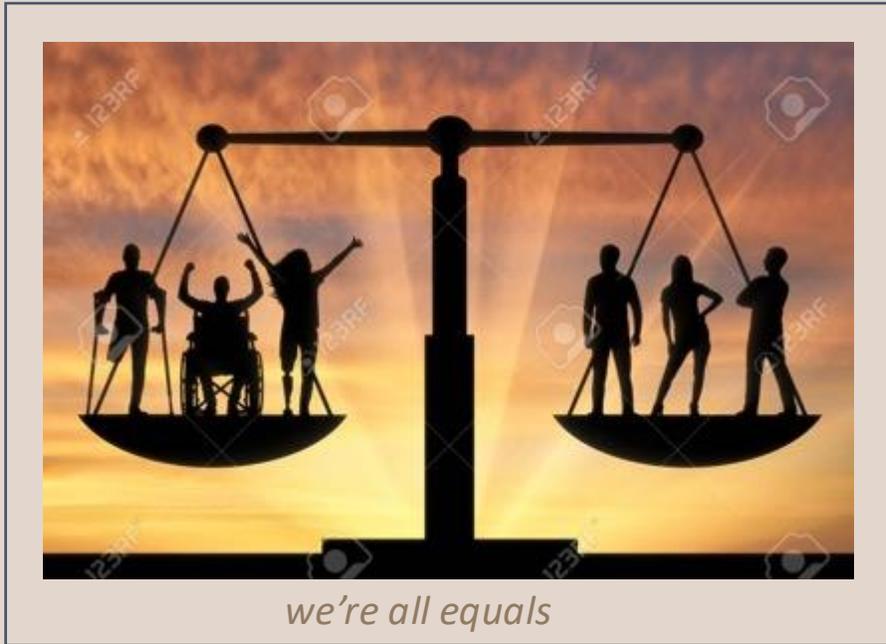


some have more power than others



- Sweden
- Spain
- Belgium (Flanders)
- Belgium (Wallony)
- Poland
- Austria

LEADING



Netherlands
Denmark
Sweden
Norway

Israel
Australia

Finland
US
Canada

Ireland
New Zealand

UK
Switzerland
Belgium

Spain
Brazil
Chile

Germany
France
Italy
Argentina
Greece
Czech

Poland
Turkey

Japan
China
India
UAE
Singapore
Russia

Korea
Philippines
African cntrs

HOW POWER-DISTANCE PLAYS UP IN BUSINESS

- Push power down, or push problems up?
- How do you determine who is in charge?
- Taking initiative: who asks direction from whom?
- Is skipping levels ok or should you follow hierarchy?
- How to determine who should be in a meeting?
- At which level in the organisation to raise questions?

DECIDING



← CONSENSUAL

TOP-DOWN →

Sweden	Netherlands	Belgium	Ireland	UK	Switzerland	France	Poland	China	Korea
Japan	Norway	Germany		Canada	Spain	Italy	Turkey	India	Thailand
	Denmark	Finland		Australia	Brazil	Greece	Russia	Saudi Arabia	African cntrs
				New Zealand	Chile	Czech	Peru	Philippines	
				Israel		US	Singapore		
						Argentina	UAE		

IF YOU COME FROM LOW POWER- DISTANCE:



UNDERSTAND HOW POWER IS DIVIDED

AVOID PUBLIC DISAGREEMENT: BE AWARE OF “LOSING FACE”

REALISE “PRO-ACTIVE” DOES NOT MEAN A LOT TO THEM

USE POWER AND HIERARCHY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

COPY THE RELEVANT HIGHER-UP IN EMAILS

IF YOU COME FROM HIGH POWER-DISTANCE:

PEOPLE CAN SPEAK UP REGARDLESS OF POWER STATUS

PUBLIC DEBATE IS NOT DISRESPECTFUL FOR THEM

REALISE THEY EXPECT YOU TO TAKE INITIATIVE

POWER AND HIERARCHY WILL NOT SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

AVOID COPY HIGHER LEVELS ON OPERATIONL REQUESTS



DIRECT OR INDIRECT

“I think that sucks!”

vs.

“There might be a better way to do this!”



LOW-CONTEXT



- Meaning is in the words
- Aim is clarity and avoid ambiguity
- Say it like it is
- Confrontation provides clarity
- Intense debate

HIGH-CONTEXT



- Meaning is in the context
- Aim is harmony and relationship
- Say it tactful and diplomatic
- Confrontation damages relationships
- Subtle hints



LOW-CONTEXT

or

HIGH-CONTEXT

*“Are you going by car to Paris on Friday,
and will you drive back the same day?”*

POLL 6

Mr. Diaz: It looks like some of us are going to have to be here on Sunday to host the client visit.

Mr. Chen: I see.

Mr. Diaz: Can you join us on Sunday?

Mr. Chen: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Diaz: That would be of great help.

Mr. Chen: Yes, Sunday is an important day.

Mr. Diaz: In what way?

Mr. Chen: It's my daughter's birthday.

Mr. Diaz: How nice. I hope you all enjoy it.

Mr. Chen: Thank you. I appreciate your understanding.

*“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking
We have a small problem. All four engines have stopped.
We are doing our damndest to get them going again.
In the meantime, I trust you are not in too much distress.”*



**WHAT YOU
SHOULD KNOW
COMING FROM
LOW-CONTEXT**



**WHAT YOU
SHOULD KNOW
COMING FROM
HIGH-CONTEXT**

ASK: "WHY WOULD THEY SAY THIS?"

ASK MANY QUESTIONS. AND THEN MORE.

AVOID DISCUSSING SENSITIVE THINGS IN PUBLIC

THERE IS NO DEEPER MEANING. STOP LOOKING!

ACCEPT BLUNTNESS, BUT DON'T TAKE IT PERSONAL

BE SHORT AND TO THE POINT. THEY WILL MISS YOUR POINT.

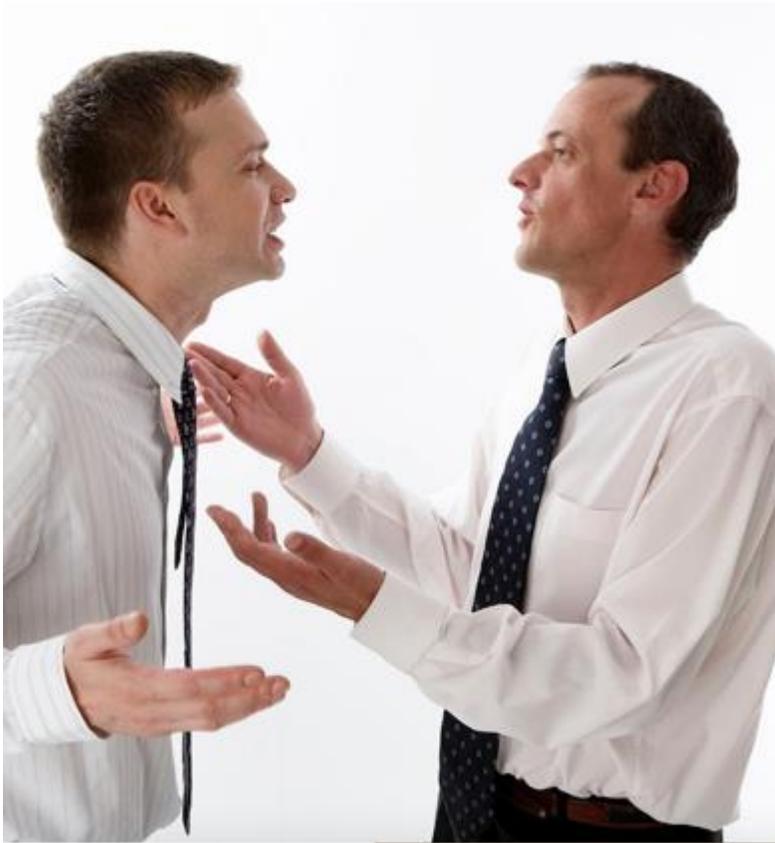
Multi-cultural teams need low-context processes!

Practical tips

1. Always realise the other person has good intentions. There is a reason they behave like they do.
2. Park your own truth and delay preaching it. Be curious about the perspective of the other one.
3. Say it like it is. Do not sugarcoat or overly worry to be politically correct. Tension is part of getting to know each other.
4. The relationship with the other person can ensure that the work gets done. Personal relationships govern business, even in Task-based cultures
5. Frustration and irritation reflect that you care. Care more about a constructive solution than about being right.



Practical tips



6. Ask why. Always ask why. Try to understand as much as you can about their perspective. And then some more.
7. Let go of the notion of 'normal' and 'strange'. There is no 'right' and 'wrong' in intercultural collaboration.
8. Asking for advice will bring you further than getting stuck in the trenches of your own culture.
9. Go offline. Most cross-cultural problems are solved in a non-formal context. Create informal exchanges.
10. Be open to differences. Then explore them. And then communicate about and across differences.

An aerial photograph of a dense city skyline, likely New York City, during sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the buildings and creating long shadows. The sky is filled with scattered white and orange-tinted clouds. The Empire State Building is prominent in the center. The foreground shows a dense cluster of skyscrapers with various architectural styles and colors, including shades of grey, white, and gold. The overall scene is vibrant and captures the energy of a major metropolitan area.

Q & A

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