## 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 5     D. Leading 3     G. Disagreeing 6

B. Evaluating 7     E. Deciding 8     H. Scheduling 4

C. Persuading 1     F. Trusting 2

1. convincing people through theory and concepts ⟷ convincing people using opinions or facts

2. building relationships while doing tasks ⟷ building relationships through sharing meals and socializing

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

**T** As a follow-up to this task, you could ask students to focus on one or two scales and say where they would place the countries they have had experience interacting with on them.

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] (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. False. French people prefer direct feedback whereas Americans typically soften their feedback to avoid offence. [01:15]

B. The British would first explain the principles and then summarize the main points when trying to persuade. False. They start with the conclusion or an executive summary. [01:44]

C. In Japan or Nigeria, there isn't a clear distinction between superiors and other employees. False. These countries rank as being quite hierarchical. [02:05]

D. In Germany, decisions are made by teams and not only by bosses. True [02:28]

E. In India, getting to know someone personally is really important to be sure you can rely on them. True [02:48]

F. In the Netherlands, having arguments and discussions can harm relationships. False. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively impact the relationship. [03:08]

G. When doing business with Italians, there shouldn't be any changes to deadlines. False. Adaptability and flexibility are valued over organization. [03:26]

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?

**T** You could share this quiz with students so that, if interested, they can do it later on their own in order to find out where they are on the scales.

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

Possible answers:

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) Being used to **open confrontation** 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.

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) During a negotiation meeting in Saudi Arabia, the manager of an American company had to push harder to get further information, feeling more comfortable with **explicit communication**.

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) It was mainly because the Malaysian executive used a **subtle tactic** to express his company's preferences that the Americans weren't sufficiently convinced, and decided not to close the deal in the end.

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). By trying to avoid **blunt criticism**, I failed to clearly communicate the necessary improvements to my French colleague, which led to no action being taken.

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) I was surprised, almost shocked, when the new Brazilian manager communicated the decisions without first reaching a **common consensus** with the team.

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) With the project's **looming deadline**, Mr Hofmann grew frustrated with his Spanish colleague's flexible approach to time, which certainly differed from the German's expectation for punctuality.

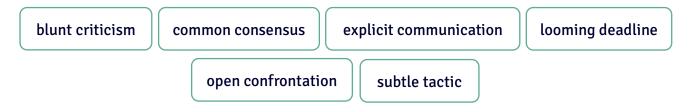**7. Look at the situations in ex. 6 again and discuss the points below.**

- 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

T    **This worksheet includes an additional task that you can use as homework or revision**. It's only available in the teacher's version of the worksheet. The task with the answer key is below, while the students' version is on the last page. Print it and hand it out to your students.

**Complete the gaps with the phrases in the boxes. Then, read the tips again and write a counterstatement to each of them.**

EXAMPLE:          Pay close attention not only to ***explicit communication***, but also to non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice.

Counterstatement: *Focusing too much on non-verbal cues can be misleading, as cultural differences may cause misinterpretation of body language and tone.*

| blunt criticism | common consensus | explicit communication | looming deadline |
|---|---|---|---|

| open confrontation | subtle tactic |
|---|---|

Possible answers:

A. You shouldn't always favour explicit communication since saying something indirectly might help avoid conflict when doing business. In business, it is important to be as precise as possible to avoid misunderstandings.

B. If you are facing a looming deadline, don't be afraid to apply pressure so that everyone learns to work to the tight timeline in the future. Applying pressure might create stress for team members from cultures with a more relaxed view of time, so deadlines should be addressed with sensitivity.

C. To address a problem and solve it more quickly, don't be afraid to voice your opinion freely in an open confrontation, even if it might lead to an argument. Voicing your opinion in an open confrontation might create a tense atmosphere and harm relationships in certain cultures,
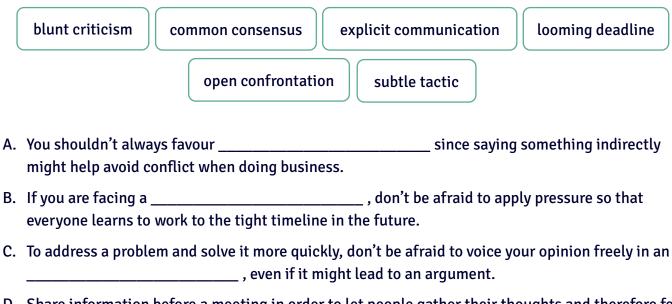
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D. Share information before a meeting in order to let people gather their thoughts and therefore feel better prepared to give their opinions and reach a common consensus. Sometimes it's better to have employees discuss something on the spot without prior preparation to find out what they really think or know about the subject.

E. A subtle tactic you could use to create a sense of bonding consists of mirroring the communication style of the person you are talking to. To create real connections, it's always better to be authentic rather than just mirroring the other person's communication style.

F. When dealing with people from other cultures, it is highly useful to offer blunt criticism since it leaves little room for misinterpretation and makes improvement more efficient. Offering blunt criticism when dealing with people from other cultures can sometimes be perceived as rude.

**Complete the gaps with the phrases in the boxes. Then, read the tips again and write a counterstatement to each of them.**

EXAMPLE: Pay close attention not only to **explicit communication**, but also to non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice.

Counterstatement: *Focusing too much on non-verbal cues can be misleading, as cultural differences may cause misinterpretation of body language and tone.*

| blunt criticism | common consensus | explicit communication | looming deadline |
|---|---|---|---|

| open confrontation | subtle tactic |
|---|---|

A. You shouldn't always favour _____ since saying something indirectly might help avoid conflict when doing business.

B. If you are facing a _____ , don't be afraid to apply pressure so that everyone learns to work to the tight timeline in the future.

C. To address a problem and solve it more quickly, don't be afraid to voice your opinion freely in an _____ , even if it might lead to an argument.

D. Share information before a meeting in order to let people gather their thoughts and therefore feel better prepared to give their opinions and reach a _____ .

E. A _____ you could use to create a sense of bonding consists of mirroring the communication style of the person you are talking to.

F. When dealing with people from other cultures, it is highly useful to offer _____ since it leaves little room for misinterpretation and makes improvement more efficient.