

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

## WHAT IS CULTURE?

There are many possible definitions of "culture". Thinking of culture in terms of a people or society it can be defined as a shared system of attitudes, values, ideas, customs, beliefs and behavior. Our culture is also influenced by education, geography and history. But not all of our behavior is determined by culture, e.g. our individual personality plays a major role.

## Intercultural communication is **complex**

There is always a complex interplay between culture in all its forms, the individual and the situation.

To **understand your business partners**, you need to know about their **personalities** and **cultural background** and consider the **situation** you are in: Is the market booming or slowing down? Are they customers or suppliers? What is the relationship to your partners?



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## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

You need to consider many aspects of interaction, thinking and sense of self to fully understand intercultural communication:

### Interaction Style

The Interaction Style dimension contains the cultural orientations that impact how people tend to interact and communicate in the workplace.

#### This dimension contains six continua:

- Fluid/Fixed
- Being/Doing
- Indirect/Direct
- Instrumental/Expressive
- Informal/Formal
- Particularistic/Universalistic

E.g. Are schedules used as negotiable guidelines? Is focus on building trusting relationships or accomplishing tasks? Are exceptions made to rules and standards?

### Thinking Style

The Thinking Style dimension contains the cultural orientations that impact how people tend to process information in the work situations.

#### This dimension contains five continua:

- Multi-Focus/Single-Focus
- Past/Future
- Low Context/High Context
- Inductive/Deductive
- Linear/Systemic

E.g. How are problems analyzed: long- or short-term projections? How are messages sent and interpreted: implicit or explicit?

### Sense of Self

The Sense of Self dimension contains the cultural orientations that impact how people tend to interact and communicate in the workplace.

#### This dimension contains six continua:

- Control/Constraint
- Private/Public
- Hierarchy/Equality
- Collectivistic/Individualistic
- Cooperative/Competitive
- Flexibility/Order

E.g. Are information shared publically? Is the working environment with equal treatment or are there status differences? Are risk and uncertainty fostered in work situations?

## HOW TO DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

People with a high level of intercultural business competence overcome cultural barriers and build constructive relationships - they create value from diversity.

- ✓ Observe what people are doing
- ✓ Enjoy intercultural encounters
- ✓ Find out about the history of a country
- ✓ Avoid stereotyping
- ✓ Use local informants to find out what you need to know
- ✓ Neither over- nor underestimate the role of culture
- ✓ Respect differences while remaining authentic: be aware of your own attitudes, beliefs and behavior and adapt your behavior

„Take an interest in others if you want others to take an interest in you.“

Adolph Freiherr von Knigge

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