Cultural Intelligence: From Buzz Word to Biz Mark

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Abstract

In the software engineering field, building teams across geographical regions is old news. Indeed, most software engineers are used to having counterparts located in different hemispheres. What engineers the world over are still struggling with, however, are the cultural differences that constantly interfere with the deliverables.

The truth of the matter is that few engineering schools spend enough time training students in the cross-cultural challenges and skills expected of them on the job once they become part of an international team. Universities, as corporations, underplay the power of cultural differences, not realizing that most problems encountered by international teams while working on a project often lie in the lack of cultural intelligence that professionals display.

As such, this paper explains the seven cultural differences humans experience when engaged in cross-cultural endeavors, as well as other variables professionals will encounter in their quest of the global mindset. Having a solid grasp of those differences will allow the technical expert to detach himself from the problem and look at it with a newly acquired set of eyes. Armed with new tools, the professional will now be able to dissect the problem and examine exactly how much of the dissonance is due to inattentive cross-cultural communication and unexamined cultural assumptions that are seldom universal.

Biography

Valérie Berset-Price is the President and Founder of Professional Passport®, a consulting firm located in Portland, OR, that specializes in international trouble-shooting and cross-cultural mediation for companies invested in doing business on an international scale. Valérie is a dual citizen of the U.S.A and Switzerland. She speaks five languages; has lived all over the world; and worked for Swiss, Taiwanese, South African, Brazilian and U.S. companies before starting her own practice. Her extensive background in international business development and intercultural training makes her an expert at pinpointing why global projects fail. Her training program, “Professional Passport®: Work Anywhere with Confidence,” brings the global business world into focus, bridging cultures to succeed in today’s marketplace. Valérie is an international presenter and a lecturer at Portland State University, University of San Diego, and Oklahoma State University. She is an international business expert for The Huffington Post and a frequent contributor to Training Magazine. She holds degrees in international business from Switzerland and in International Relations from the Monterey Institute of International Studies

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Introduction

For many years in the United States, students, professionals and executives alike have looked at the field of cross-cultural communication as skills that did not deserve much attention. To them, it was the cherry atop the cake rather than the steel mold that would shape the cake. Globalization has, however, brought the world to the desk and speakerphones of many professionals who are in hourly contact with individuals born and reared (and often still located) on the other side of the earth. The result of having thrown people from different cultural background together randomly and without proper training is too often experienced as a loss of efficiency and a communication gap that creates unpleasant friction and unhealthy frustration.

Throughout this paper we will outline the most important cultural dimensions encountered in an engineering setting and provide the tools for professionals to self-diagnose whether cultural differences might be causing the problem. This document includes an introduction to the field of cultural intelligence, starting with a glossary of culture and the components forming culture. It provides access to a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that should allow the participant to identify his or her cultural DNA. We will then dive into the seven cultural dimensions that are too often erroneously considered universal to realize that they can strongly vary from country to country. Lastly, we will examine the traits that form a solid global manager: someone capable of building relationships across cultures to ensure cooperation and success for the project. Each section ends with three questions that will allow the reader to reflect on the level of preparation and training in place in his or her work environment.

1 Glossary of Culture

1.1 Culture Defined

Central to the field of American anthropology, “culture” in the 21st century is defined by four fields: biological anthropology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and archeology. Cultural anthropology is central to this paper and was defined in the 19th century by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor⁴ as “a diverse set of activities characteristic of all human societies.”

In 1973 Professor Geert Hofstede² published the first comprehensive study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. Using Hofstede’s definition, we can say that culture is defined as the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another.” As such, people who belong to a particular culture (such as the Japanese culture, the Chinese culture, the French culture, etc.) have been programmed since birth to behave within the acceptable norms of that culture.

1.2 Cultural Competence Defined

Cultural competence, according to the brilliant British linguist and cross-cultural expert Richard Lewis,⁵ is “a set of aligned behaviors, attitude and policies that come together in a system, organization, or among professionals and enable each to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.” As such, cultural competence classes focus on the mechanics of cultures, teaching people what must be known and respected in a culture (cf. in Muslim cultures, avoid showing the sole of your foot by crossing your leg, avoid using your left hand, etc.) to prevent offending or at least committing a serious faux-pas.
1.3 Cultural Intelligence Defined

According to the work of Dr. David Livermore, cultural intelligence is “an individual’s capabilities to function, interact, and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings and backgrounds.” Indeed, long gone is the time where populations in the West would be homogenous and work teams are formed strictly of one single ethnic group. Today’s search for optimization, efficiency, profit, international market shares, and know-how often regroups people from around the world under one virtual roof.

Communicating among people who grew up around us and share similar values and expectations is not always easy. In fact, when listening to colleagues, friends and family, it seems that inadequate communication among people is at the root of most divergences and conflicts. Adding cross-cultural differences to the mix (such as differing concepts of punctuality, autonomy, independence, liberty, fairness, entitlement, merit, and respect) tends to complicate communication to the point people disengage from the conversation or bring value judgment to the equation: judgment that is rooted only in their own cultural experiences and expectations.

In the 21st century’s business world, as noted in a special issue of The Economist on “The Future of Work”, leading with cultural intelligence and thus being able to adapt one’s discourse, expectations and behavior based on the culture of one’s interlocutor is the differentiating factor that separates success from failure. To reuse Livermore’s metaphor, cultural intelligence is realizing that each time we interact with someone from a different culture, we are driving on the other side of the road. As such, we must feel the need to focus more and be fully present within the cultural differences we experience.

In view of the above, the objective of this paper is to transform software engineers into “global bridgers”: professionals who know how to draw from other cultures while being cognitively aware that their own culture may interfere with their innate ability to understand someone’s actions, analyze a situation, or resolve a problem. “Global bridgers” are people who have been trained to recognize how their own cultural DNA positions themselves with regard to accepted behaviors and expectations. As such, they are able to refrain from immediately condemning behaviors that may differ from the expected ones and instead focus on seeking the sheer intention behind the action. The training natural “global bridgers” underwent often started with the learning of a foreign language and a series of long periods living abroad. That said, there is more than one way to become a “global bridger.” Many monolingual and mono-cultural professionals have been able to develop the level of sensibility and awareness required to lead with cultural intelligence by investing time in understanding how cultures are formed, what components are considered cultural, and how cultural dimensions vary from culture to culture. As such, they are able to readjust their lenses on a constant basis to seize the diversity global interaction brings to their desks.

To this effect, we would like this journey to start with the completion of a questionnaire that should allow software engineers to become aware of their own cultural DNA. Please turn to Appendix A to complete the questionnaire.

The answers from the questionnaire should allow the respondent to situate him- or herself throughout the rest of this presentation as each cultural dimension is analyzed and positioned on a map of the world. Having access to our own cultural DNA helps us realize we are made of frames of references. Those frames of reference, which are rooted entirely in the culture in which we grew up, are (according to Alan and Barbara Pease [2004], fully instilled in us by the age of seven. Indeed, by that tender age most human beings know what is right from wrong, permitted and reprimanded, allowed and forbidden. By the time people join the workforce, those cultural concepts have been enforced to the point that they are ingrained and can barely be dissociated from the genetic makeup of the individual.
2 Applied Culture and Tools

2.1 The Lewis Model of Cultures

The Lewis Model\(^2\), focuses on the different reactive variations cultures display with regard to situations and decision-making processes. It is a visual tool that should allow software engineers to quickly remind themselves that people who come from cultures different than their own might react differently to a situation than anticipated. The Lewis Model is a handy tool that teaches us at a glance that one must acknowledge cultural differences before engaging with others:

![Lewis Model Diagram](http://www.crossculture.com/services/cross-culture/)

The optimal way to use the Lewis Model is by reminding us of the cultural differences each country brings to the equation. Start by finding yourself on the diagram. Are you part of a large circle or a smaller circle? What color represents your country? The colored triangle, through the three large circles, illustrates three cultural types going from the linear-active (blue,) where people mainly rely on facts and logic to make decisions to multi-active (red,) where people mainly rely on emotions and impulses to make decisions; to reactive (yellow,) where people tend to accommodate the decisions making process.

As a U.S. citizen, you would be in the blue, which means you are a “linear active, cool and factual, decisive planner.” As an Israeli, you would be in a medium purple: thus still linear, but not so cool and factual as a U.S. national. If today you were scheduled to interact with a person from Turkey, we would encourage you to find where Turkey is located on the diagram with respect to your own positioning. You will see that Turkey is in orange, thus between the red and the yellow. Culturally speaking, that person will be much more emotional in his or her decision-making than you will as a U.S. citizen or an Israeli. He or she will be focused on building a good relationship with you before being comfortable with moving on to the details of the transaction. The Turk will be polite and avoid disagreeing with you, which as we will see later does not automatically mean that he or she agrees with what you will be proposing. He or she will also probably not perceive time management the same as you do. As such, and in a couple of seconds, you already have a visual of how your interaction with that person might unfold. This gives you
the opportunity to quickly assess and then adapt your own behavior and expectations to meet the ones of your interlocutor to build trust.

In addition to being concise and handy, the Lewis Model is the rare tool available in the field of cross-cultural studies to include Sub-Saharan countries, as well as certain Latin American countries that are either under U.S. embargos or considered unstable by the U.S. government.

Most research presented below in this paper comes from the debriefing of U.S. nationals working internationally. Because doing business with Sub-Saharan Africa and certain Latin American countries (such as Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela) is relatively new for U.S. businesses, data on cultural behaviors are difficult to find. This explains why the subsequent maps of the world and listing of countries used to illustrate this paper tend to leave the African continent and some parts of Latin America blank due to insufficient data on the subject.

To this end, we have included a map of colonial Africa that shows to some extent the differences encountered on the continent regarding language and religion (see chapter 2.3) and how those differences tie to the former European colonies. Some careful parallels can be drawn from the historical facts, even though powerful tribal differences are entirely ignored when contemplating the continent from that angle.

2.2 The Role of Religion in Culture

To some, religion cannot be considered evolutionary. To others, religion is the evidence that societal norms needed to be imposed for people to peacefully coexist. As such, archeologists have been able to identify that, at a time when people started to gather en masse in urban areas while being illiterate and uneducated, religious sanctions subtly convinced people to follow certain rules that otherwise could have put the health and longevity of many in jeopardy. Several examples of this can be found in the Muslim, Hindu, and Christian religions where people have been advised to refrain from certain activities to avoid incurring the wrath of their God.

In the Muslim world, at a time when meat was sold while exposed to the elements for days, pork was found to have the shortest shelf life, poisoning people who had the misfortune of eating the decomposing flesh. Making it *haraam*, or sinful in the eyes of Allah, was powerful enough to prevent people from eating pork.

In India, where tuberculosis (the White Plague) is still rampant, not removing one’s shoes when entering someone’s house is a religious offense. Infected people tend to spit in the streets, making it easy to inadvertently step in contaminated waste. Shoes are thus considered too dirty to be admitted in the house because they bring with them the possibility of contaminating the entire household with disease. Removing one’s shoes before entering a house is thus a rule of conduct that has been included in the Hindu Scriptures to protect people from their own inadvertence.

In the Christian world, the Ten Commandments (or Seven Commandments for those who follow the New Testament) are also rules of conduct to maintain harmony between family members, neighbors, and even enemies. Those rules were put in place to prevent citizens from being at each other’s throats when forced to live in cramped urban quarters.

Per the graph below, one can see how religiously diverse today’s world is, accounting for nine distinct groups:

![Religious Diversity Graph]

Source: [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)

Now that the fabric and importance of culture in the world is clear, it is time to look at the reasons why leading with cultural intelligence in the world of global engineering are of high importance and interest.
3 Importance of Cultural Intelligence in the Global Engineering Context:

Because of the precision required in the engineering world, the interconnectedness of the users, and the multilevel approach to problem solving, it is of utmost importance that software engineers who evolve in multicultural teams develop an acute cultural awareness. Through descriptions, explanations, illustrations, and examples to the key cultural components that come into play when engaging across cultures, this cultural awareness can be developed. Through this exercise we hope software engineers will develop the skills needed to effectively manage across cultures and notice the positive impact their newly created awareness will have on projects, thus reducing failure risk considerably.

The cultural dimensions that will be examined are:

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The colored maps and country cataloging per cultural dimension are based on the research of Solomon & Schell, Geert Hofstede, Richard Lewis, and the author’s experience as an expatriate for more than 20 years.

3.1 Social Stratification: Hierarchy vs. Egalitarianism

Mark is a U.S. software engineer with a Bachelor’s Degree working for a large multinational on the West Coast of the United States. His team is international and includes several Germans and Romanians. Mark has been with the company for seven years. Because he is bright, efficient, and does good work, Mark’s ranking is similar to the one of Dr. Diet, his German colleague who holds a Ph.D.

According to Mark, Dr. Diet makes regular comments to him about his status, appalled that a man with such “limited” education has reached the same status level within the company that he has. While Mark finds Dr. Diet’s remarks amusing, Dr. Diet is far from amused. This dichotomy creates invisible but palpable friction within the team: Dr. Diet has a sense that he is above the team and should not be expected to work so hard as the others who, in his eyes, are of lesser status. There is thus a detectable discontent that erupts from the way cultures reward achievements. This cultural difference is interpreted as a lack of fairness by the German national and, as a result, he has a potential lack of trust, confidence, and respect for Mark’s professional abilities. In fact, Mark believes that Dr. Diet, the team leader, refuses to use any tool developed by him in the United States. Mark believes Dr. Diet finds his work inferior to that done in Germany by highly qualified professionals such as himself. According to Katrina, Mark’s boss, the team is dysfunctional at best and does not work well together, which is reflected in the quality of the work the members do jointly.

This situation is common and is rooted in the way the two cultures operate: Germany is hierarchy and prestige-oriented (illustrated on the map below in gold), and the United States (on the map shown in red) is oriented toward equality. As such, in the United States people are rewarded based on merit and personal accomplishments rather than their level of education and social status. In Germany merit has little to do with success, as the culture is mainly oriented toward a strict hierarchy that yields rewards for
people who have carefully climbed the precise steps of the professional ladder outlined for them since birth. Those steps are coated with a strong education and many years of seniority. As a result, the Germans harbor a disrespect for the self-made man who skipped the painful academic steps, choosing instead the risk of demonstrating raw capacities on the job.

Looking at the map, we notice that these are the countries where egalitarianism is applied:
- Australia, Canada, Denmark, Israel, the Netherlands, and New Zealand being the strongest
- Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States being just one notch below

Hierarchy and egalitarianism is a balancing act in:
- Argentina, Belgium, France, Ireland, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the U.K.

In these countries, the culture is more hierarchy-based:
- Austria, Brazil, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Mexico, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam

Hierarchy is in full force in:
- Brunei, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, United Arab Emirates

GLOBAL VIEW OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION:

Source: based on the work of Hofstede, Lewis, Solomon & Schell, and Berset-Price

In India, a country where hierarchy is tangible, the U.S. technique of promoting someone through the ranks while hosting an office on Indian land is perceived not only as despicable but somehow dangerous for the person who has been selected for promotion. In a country where the caste system defined a family’s condition for generations, promoting someone without any concern for the person’s gender, marital status, social status, education, seniority, ties to the community, and other members of the group
can create regrettable tensions within a company. A person who has been singled out for a promotion to the detriment of his peers may have no option but to leave the company.

It is thus of utmost importance to spend time understanding and respecting the cultural differences at play. One easy way to realize the type of culture into which the professional is stepping is through keen observation. Before making any decision, professionals should take the time to observe their surroundings and ask questions of many different people. They could find someone in-country who has a similar level of responsibility and build a strong relationship so questions can be asked in a safe way. No one should make assumptions or jump to conclusions. What the naked eye can see is often only a fraction of the reality.

**Diagnosis:**

- In your company, have employees and managers been made aware of the cultural differences that exist between them and their foreign colleagues as far as hierarchy vs. individualism?
- Has your company taken the time to build teams by paying close attention to the fact that the way professional reward is structured might differ in your country compared to that of the home country for some foreign team members?
- Does your company provide cross-cultural communication, management training, and coaching for managers and employees who are part of international teams?

### 3.2 Independence Level: Individualism vs. Group Focus

Gregg is a wonderful manager. He is a great communicator and really cares about the people who report to him; everybody agrees on that. He is supportive, caring, and always ready to roll up his sleeves when the job requires his help. Last month he was especially pleased with one of his South Korean employees. The client in Seoul was threatening to cancel the contract due to some recurring software errors that kept causing major problems within the company. Dae-Ho, known to his Western counterparts as Sam, saved the day. He not only resolved the problem, but he demonstrated great initiative; the client’s complaint came during the night in the U.S., and he took it upon himself to visit the client and provide the needed reassurance that the problem had been permanently fixed. When Gregg came to work, he found an email from Dae-Ho outlining what had been done that day. To show his appreciation, Gregg sent an “atta-boy” email to Dae-Ho, copying the entire company on it. In his email, Gregg outlined how much he appreciated the initiative Dae-Ho took and how others should be inspired by it. The company needed more of that, especially in Asia. The next day, Gregg was informed by the Seoul office that Dae-Ho had presented his resignation letter to the executive team. The “atta-boy” email embarrassed him to the point that he could not continue to work there. Gregg was puzzled and furious. He requested Dae-Ho’s cell phone number to talk to him in person, but Dae-Ho refused to take his calls. It was a dead end. How can a compliment so well deserved turn into a crisis where a talented employee feels forced to resign?

The truth is that Gregg is a U.S. national who grew up in a culture that fosters and rewards individualism. In the U.S. children are taught that they must be good team players, something that is largely implemented through team sports, while knowing that the success ultimately rests on an individual’s shoulders. Most U.S. nationals grow up in a competitive setting where there is always a winner and a loser. In contrast, in South Korea (as in most Asian countries) the philosophy of Confucianism, a rigid ethical and moral system, teaches that the whole is only as good as the sum of its parts. As such, nobody deserves special praise because achievement depends on the efforts of many invisible hands that contribute to the success of the group—never on one single individual. Singling out someone in a group-oriented culture will make that individual appear extremely selfish, disconnected, and disrespectful of the rest of the group.

The author, on her first trip to Taipei in 1997, experienced this situation first hand: she hired Liu, a Mandarin-English interpreter, to assist her with her business meetings. Liu was a delightful young lady...
with impeccable English. For a week Liu went far beyond the call of duty, something that did not go unnoticed. At the end of the week, Valérie went to the office with Liu to pay for her services and had the opportunity to meet the owner of the language bank. For about 10 minutes Valérie praised her interpreter, asking Liu to interpret what she was saying in Mandarin to her boss. The more Valérie praised Liu, the more Liu showed embarrassment. Thinking that verbal praises were not enough and that Liu expected a good gratuity, Valérie reached into her purse and gave Liu $100 as a tip. Liu immediately returned the money and excused herself. Valérie left in a taxi, puzzled by Liu's behavior; she had not even said goodbye to her. Back at the office, Valérie sent several notes to Liu, but none were answered.

On a flight to Japan two years later, Valérie sat next to a Taiwanese lady who then lived in California. They became engrossed in a conversation about cultural differences between their respective home countries (Valérie is Swiss) and the U.S. Valérie told her about her experience with Liu, aware that she might have done something wrong. Her seat companion confirmed that forcing Liu to speak of herself to her boss in a complimentary fashion would have been horrid, and giving her a big tip definitely tipped the scale as far as mortifying behavior for Liu.

Cultural faux-pas are often realized too late, once others have been offended. It is thus recommended you enter any new culture with a humble attitude, asking for forgiveness and correction if any inadvertent cultural mistakes are committed while in the host culture. A humble attitude and the desire to learn go a long way!

Looking at the map, we notice that the following countries are hierarchy-based:

- Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Qatar, South Korea, Vietnam
- Austria, Brazil, China, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates

In the following countries, hierarchy and group focus is a balancing act:

- Argentina, Chile, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom

In these countries, the culture is more individualistic:

- Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Switzerland

Individualism is in full force in:

- Canada, New Zealand, the United States
GLOBAL VIEW OF INDEPENDENCE LEVEL

Source: based on the work of Hofstede, Lewis, Solomon & Schell, and Berset-Price

To people who come from individualistic cultures, the group-focus approach is often perceived as unfair; they tend to believe that everybody would want to be acknowledged as the person who saved the day or deserves accolades. In fact, this perception is culturally biased and people who were reared in a group-focus culture find it petty and disconnected to demand recognition, as they see the big picture and realize there is normally more than one person behind any success. It is thus of utmost importance to pay careful attention to that cultural paradigm and not assume that everybody would want personified reward. Furthermore, if a manager insists on giving praise to an employee who comes from a group-focus culture, consider doing it privately instead of in front of others.

Diagnosis:

- In your company, how do you deal with giving praise and criticism to people who may not come from an individualistic culture?
- Has your company taken the time to train its managers on showing sensibility toward the group-focus preference?
- What action would you pursue if an employee were to quit because of a misinterpreted “atta-boy”?

3.3 Business Focus: Transactionalism vs. Relationship-Oriented

Marsha is a great project manager. She is focused, efficient, and task-driven. When she is at work, she is mindful of company time and does not engage in chit-chat. Her email correspondence reflects that business-oriented style as well; for instance, she reuses the email she received and inserts her response in red in the text. She never says “hello” or “thank you” and totally ignores any inquiries from others about her private life. For example, last week, Maeve from Brazil wrote the following:
Dearest Marsha,

I hope this note finds you well. It must be summer for you now in Seattle, and I saw that graduation time is in full swing all over the nation. I love seeing the graduation ceremony of U.S. universities; it’s so beautiful with the flying caps… I wish that we would do something similar in Brazil. For us it looks more like a giant party with little organization. My son graduated last year as a mechanical engineer from the University of Curitiba. I only have one child. What about you, Marsha? Do you have children?

When you have a minute, would you please send me the report that was completed last week by your team? We need to update our schedule, and being aware of your deadlines would be helpful to my boss.

Thank you very much, and have a wonderful weekend.

Your Friend,
Maeve

Now, here is the response Maeve received a few hours later from Marsha:

Schedule attached

Based on this cold response to her long and kind email, Maeve’s disappointment could not be hidden. She went to her boss and asked why the U.S. team is so cold and condescending to the Brazilian team, wondering if they were racists or think they are better than Brazilians. In Maeve’s heart, Marsha had been classified as a cold, selfish American with whom she would never engage again. In fact, a month later Maeve received another cold email from Marsha, this time asking her for information—which Maeve proceeded to delete without any response. Communication had come to an end. Marsha re-sent her email with the subject line “Resent. A/R” but not a word added. Maeve did not respond to that one either, and her boss (another Brazilian) thought the silent treatment was justified. If Marsha could not be polite and civil, she would not get any cooperation from the Brazilian team. When the project turned out to be late and a large amount of money was at risk, Marsha complained that the Brazilian team was unresponsive and uncooperative. The members never answered emails and would not provide the information needed for the project to move smoothly. When the Brazilian team was questioned, it responded that the U.S. team was disrespectful and rude. Marsha was shocked to learn from her boss that her communication style was at the root of the project failure! When questioned, she confessed never acknowledging emails that diverted from purely work-related topics and noted that to her those comments Maeve made about her kid were “white noise” that did not belong in a company email.

The differing communication styles and the crisis that ensued are typical and extremely common between people who come from cultures as different in that regard as North and South America are. Indeed, in the U.S. business is centered around the product/service, price, warranty, marketing, etc. Seldom is it centered on forging a relationship. In fact, in the U.S. employees are often strongly warned never to mix business and pleasure.

In cultures such as Brazil’s where people are relationship-oriented, business is considered a by-product of what happens when people have great relationships with each other. As such, relationship-oriented cultures need to engage on a personal level to build that relationship. Engaging in conversation such as the one Maeve included in her original email to Marsha is a perfect example of what is being taught in universities in "Business 101" classes all over Latin America. Indeed, Latin people would never consider skipping the “hello” or the typical “personal” paragraph in their communication. There is no line between business and pleasure because business has to be pleasurable in order to take place.

Looking at the map, it can be seen that only North America is so transaction-oriented. The rest of the world in large part has a need for relationship building, and the Southern hemisphere (with the exception of Australia) demands relationship-building to establish business. The fact that Australia does not follow the rule points toward another important element outlining this difference: the role of the law in Western
cultures. In North America particularly, business owners do not feel that a relationship is needed to resolve arising problems. For that, they have hefty attorneys who specialize in taking care of noncomplying customers. In fast-growing regions, previously referred to as the emerging world, the law is often corrupted and thus not equipped to tackle business matters. As a result, business owners in those regions know that aligning only with trusted people who share the same values and people who operate on the same level will save the day once problems arise. Problems always occur in business—even when it is begun with the best possible intentions. This is also the reason why initiating business internationally requires patience and determination, as it may take several years and many business trips to earn the trust of a potential customer. In contrast, in the U.S. people are quick to place orders and few request face time.

In Valérie’s experience as an international trouble-shooter, being aware of that difference is the subtle element that often prevents U.S. businesses from succeeding in the international arena. North Americans do not realize that building relationships is at the core of doing business, and they often give up when purchase orders are not yielded on the second business trip.

Chinese guanxi, a complex social system that relies entirely on established relationships, is now fairly well known outside the country. Foreigners wanting to do business without established Chinese partnerships in China seldom see results. To many Chinese nationals, guanxi is the equivalent of money in the bank, as they fully grasp the importance of having solid, established relationships. As such, to the untrained North American eye Chinese employees may appear to be wasting time building their webs, as in the U.S. relationships will take you only so far due to policies related to nepotism and the belief that business and pleasure should never mix.

Lee is Chinese-American; he grew up in San Jose, Calif., does not speak Mandarin, and is third-generation Chinese. As a result, Lee looks Chinese but acts like an American, something that he and his employer neglected understanding when they sent Lee and his family on assignment in Guangdong, China. There, Lee took over a brand new Chinese team and directed it like an American would, without any understanding of guanxi, hierarchy, group focus, etc. The fact that Lee looked Chinese confused his team even more and made Lee’s cultural faux-pas entirely inadmissible. How could he not know that in a meeting you don’t single out people who don’t perform? Lee also despised the bureaucratic and hierarchic Chinese system and refused to address people using their titles and names. He gave Western names to his team instead of learning how to pronounce people’s name in the dialect of the region. It did not take long for Lee to realize that his team did not respect him. What he could not understand were the reasons why. He had been an acclaimed manager in California for many years and enjoyed great success. What could be so different here? The universal language of logic did not differ, and his style had not changed.

The fact that Lee’s style did not adapt to his environment was compounded by his Chinese look and made the two factors a deadly professional combination. Lee came back to the U.S. eight months into his three-year assignment. Moving Lee’s household from the U.S. to China twice in one year, in addition to having to send someone else to Guangdong to replace him, tallied near $100,000 in logistics cost! For a regrettable reason, Lee’s managers bypassed his cultural training, leading to a costly fiasco and the loss of a profitable project.
GLOBAL VIEW OF BUSINESS FOCUS

Looking at the map, it can be seen that the following countries are transaction-based:
- Canada, the United States
- Australia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland

In the following countries, transaction and relationship is a balancing act:
- Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Ukraine, the U.K., Vietnam

In these countries, the culture is more relationship-oriented:
- Argentina, Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Egypt, France, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey

Relationship-building is in full force in:
- China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, United Arab Emirates

As such, it is important that international players take the time to train the team to mirror the behavior of the international counterparts, even if at times it may feel counterproductive or inefficient. Being able to meet their human needs will provide deep cooperation down the line, as a well-established relationship often means devotion and loyalty to the relationship-oriented individual.
Diagnosis:

- In your company, must everyone comply with a one-size-fits-all mentality where the U.S. mindset supersedes all others?
- Is your executive team aware of the differing business focus and thus able to pinpoint the problems that arise when it is not properly taken into consideration?
- What does management do at your company to promote the global mindset among people?

3.4 Communication: Direct vs. Indirect

Egbert is the kind of man who doesn't mince words. He says what he has to say regardless of who is in the room, and he never avoids a conflict. He, in fact, loves conflicts and heated debates. Egbert is Dutch. His U.S. colleagues have learned that Egbert's opinion will be shared with the group, even (and especially) when unsolicited. Many on the team find Egbert abrasive and overbearing. To everybody's horror, Egbert called the V.P. of Engineering on the carpet a few months ago, and just about everyone was hoping Egbert would be fired. Interestingly, the V.P. did not seem to mind—and it can be traced to the fact that the V.P. spent several years working in Europe, where he got used to that direct communication style. In fact, the V.P. knows that in Europe being direct and not sugar-coating communication is perceived as a sign of integrity and a compliment to management. It shows that the employee is engaged and willing to contribute.

Unfortunately, the V.P. is the only one who has had the opportunity to develop a global mindset. Everybody else on the team is stuck on how rude Egbert is, and people begin to sabotage his work or avoid projects that include him. This is especially true for the Indian and Japanese members of the team. Egbert's directness shocks them. They see nothing redeeming in being so frank on purpose. It is true that Egbert does not display much of a global mindset either. He pushes his Asian team members' buttons on a daily basis by creating unnecessary confrontations, expecting a "no" instead of a "maybe" and a "yes" instead of a "might be." The Northern Europeans and the Asians on the team are like oil and water, both hoping the other will quit being who he or she is.

The truth is that everyone communicates differently based on the culture of birth; in low-context cultures, such as Europe, the orator is responsible for making him or herself understood. There is also a trend that requires that a person know good rhetoric when speaking. The message must make sense, but the delivery is just as important. Germans and French people are particularly prone to this style wherein prose is often used to make a speech or toast in front of a group. U.S. nationals, who are more to the point, tend to view the prose style as being in love with the sound of one's own voice.

Interestingly, in high-context cultures such as Southeast Asia, Japan, India, etc., the interlocutor is the one in charge of understanding the message, which is often provided through riddles, stories, and metaphors. Discovering the hidden message is a sign of cleverness and intelligence.

As a result, Mike, a U.S. software engineer who manages a large multicultural team, detests having conversations with his Asian reports. To him, most conversations tend to be noncommittal and devoid of opinion; Asians agree with everything in the meetings but will do the opposite of what they just agreed to as soon as they return to their desks. In Mike's mind, all Asians are passive-aggressive. But are they really?

Looking at the map, we notice that the following countries embrace direct communication:

- Denmark, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland
- Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, the United States

In the following countries, communication between direct and indirect depends on the subject:
GLOBAL VIEW OF COMMUNICATION

Source: based on the work of Hofstede, Lewis, Solomon & Schell, and Berset-Price

In light of what we learned with regard to group-focused cultures, wanting individual commitment from group-focused individuals will often bring disappointment. Being very direct and even confrontational tends to make people shut down if they come from indirect communication-based cultures. Thus it might be better to change around that technique and instead build group consensus within the team, providing the group-focus individuals with time to regroup among themselves. When a message has to be passed down, consider involving an intermediary to deliver the message in a subtle way. This will prevent the person from losing face in front of the manager and will probably yield better results.

Diagnosis:

- In your company, do you force everybody to respond to the direct communication style favored in the United States?
- When people do not respond to your company’s communication style, what technique do you use?
Does your company move employees around, dipping them in foreign cultures in an attempt to develop cultural intelligence?

3.5 The Concept of Time: Linear vs. Circular

Eduardo is a Mexican code developer. He is brilliant at what he does, but according to the U.S. team he has no time-management skills. This makes him unreliable and too dangerous to use on time-sensitive projects. His teammates hate dealing with him because he may well work relentlessly on a project without any sleep for three days and then vanish for two. When his boss reminds him of an important deadline, Eduardo’s response is either a smile or a laugh. To re-use one of his colleague’s quotes, Eduardo has the “time awareness of someone who lives in prehistoric times.” To that colleague, it’s a miracle Eduardo graduated from college because he appears very undisciplined to his Northern counterparts who come from regions where time is linear and considered a commodity.

In several Latin American cultures (and others in gold and grey in the map) such as Mexico, Brazil and Chile, time is circular. This means that time always comes back and that people have the capacity to create time when needed. While linear cultures compete with the clock, trying to accomplish all that needs to be done within a certain period, circular cultures slice time by activity. Going to a meeting is an activity for which time has been created. Meeting a friend for a drink is an activity for which time has been created. Taking a nap or going for a walk is outside the created time and therefore has no impact on someone’s schedule. It will not delay you or push you back in your schedule; it is an invisible activity. On the other hand, if a Latin or Southeast Asian person receives an unexpected visitor in his office, he or she will not inform the visitor that another activity had been scheduled. He or she will create time to be with that person while the next appointment waits.

In Latin America, where the author lived for many years, no one is in a rush and being two hours late to a meeting is considered okay. No one gets bent out of shape because the meeting did not start on time. Coffee will be served, cigarettes will be offered, other people will come in to chat: time is always put to good social use to maintain that relationship-oriented dimension that was mentioned previously. When Valérie (who comes from one of the most linear cultures in the world) worked in Chile, she had to entirely rethink her paradigms, as punctuality was just not a tool that had any weight in that culture. She often felt she had taken with her a toolbox that would allow her to fix the plumbing of a house, only to realize upon arrival that it was the computer that needed repairs. Her toolbox was inadequate and needed to be refurbished. It took her a long time to let go of her cultural assumptions and accompanying judgment calls with regard to people who could not be punctual. She had the hardest time taking unpunctual people at face value, having immediately assumed that the person was disrespectful of her and unprofessional. She realized working with many unpunctual people that her assessing tool, punctuality, was a dull blade. Unpunctual people turned out to be extremely capable and very bright; they just did not evolve in a milieu where time mattered much.

To survive and deliver her projects on time to clients in the Northern hemisphere, Valérie became good at modifying deadlines, building a three- to four-week buffer into the deliverables. As such, she could please both sides of the transaction without having to harass the unpunctual and without disappointing the on-time delivery customers. While working for a Brazilian company for eight years, Valérie noticed that punctuality and adherence to deadline were never part of her performance review. Punctuality is a dimension in Brazil that holds such little value that it is not worthy of comment!

Looking at the map, we notice that the following countries embrace punctuality:
  o Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, the United States
  o Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, the U.K.
In the following countries, punctuality is a balancing act:
  o Argentina, China, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine

In those countries, punctuality has little meaning:
  o Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Vietnam

Punctuality has no meaning in:
  o Saudi Arabia, Spain, Thailand, United Arab Emirates

GLOBAL VIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF TIME

Without a doubt, it is impossible to change a culture. What is doable, however, is to change our own expectations and to manage amid cultures. As such, one must first realize and accept that there is more than one way to be a professional. My definition includes punctuality, while Eduardo’s does not. My responsibility, as a “global bridger,” is to manage the difference: to find ways to work in harmony as a global community. After all, performance is a bit like beauty in that it lies in the eye of the beholder!

Diagnosis:
  o What does being on time mean to your corporate culture? Is being unpunctual a strike against promotion?
  o In your company, do you have “global bridgers?” These are people who have the skills to work between cultures, giving you access to talents and skills that otherwise would not make the cut.
  o When people do not respond to your company’s expectation with regard to time management, what technique do you use?
3.6 Handling Change: Receptive vs. Resistant to Change

In the United States – a young, dynamic country – change is the essence of life. People love change and are quick to adapt to the newest technology, take in stride the most recent corporate buy-out, or even easily accept the fact that their favorite wine has been discontinued. U.S. nationals love change.

Throughout the world, the countries that have been classified as most receptive to change (Australia and Canada) are also very large and young countries that experience harsh climate changes. As such, they experience situations that are beyond humanity’s control, such as endless months of snow or years of drought. Resilience and flexibility have developed out of the natural challenges one deals with in those countries, forcing people to roll with the punches. In areas where the climate is more clement, the space is more manageable, and history runs deep, flexibility and adaptability are rare. People are set in their ways and tend to resist change.

Christian experienced this first hand. As a consultant, he was hired to reconcile the IT system of several companies that were bought out by a U.S. competitor. While technically competent and fluent in French, Spanish, and English, Christian had never lived in Europe. The resistance that awaited him during his three-month stay was beyond his wildest imagination: Europeans did not want to comply with the universal IT system he was there to implement. The classes he was there to teach once the system became operational were deserted. Employees refused to show up to work in protest of the change they now had to implement in their professional lives. Yes, the IT system was operational; but nobody wanted to operate it! What a conundrum!

Christian’s experience was beyond belief, and he was very poorly equipped to deal with the resistance he encountered because it came from every level of the organizations and was expressed slightly differently in every country in which he operated. In brief, while Christian spoke the languages needed to communicate with the employees, he was not cross-culturally prepared to handle the situation. He was unfamiliar with the cultures and at a loss. He and his employer had wrongly assumed that employees would embrace the change he embodied.

Looking at the map, we notice that the following countries embrace change:
- Australia, Canada
- Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, the U.K., the United States

In the following countries, embracing change is a balancing act:
- Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Ukraine

In those countries, change is resisted:
- Brunei, Chile, Czech Republic, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines, Russia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam

Change is strongly resisted in:
- Saudi Arabia, Iran
GLOBAL VIEW OF HANDLING CHANGE

Source: based on the work of Hofstede, Lewis, Solomon & Schell, and Berset-Price

The ability to deal with change is also interestingly linked to the permission to fail. (Note: this is not the focus of the above map.) In cultures where failing is perceived as a canvas for growth, people feel allowed to take risks and engage in activities where they may not yet be in full control. In cultures where failing is a disgrace from which it is difficult to recover (the concept of “losing face”), embracing change with an open mind is harder. As such, it is essential to keep that cultural paradigm in mind, especially when hiring. Charlie, a talented high-tech Chinese national who interviewed for a manager position in Shanghai for a U.S. subsidiary, shared with me that in his interview a panel of four interviewers asked him to speak of the failures he encountered in his life and how failing helped him grow as a professional and an individual. This question made Charlie so uncomfortable that he became mute. His muteness was translated as a lack of maturity and experience for the position. He was the best-qualified candidate, but he did not get the job due to the nature of his response to the question. The panelists had no idea that asking a Chinese person about failure was the equivalent of asking a U.S. citizen about his sexual orientation in an interview setting.

Failure in many Asian cultures, including Japan, is worth committing hara-kiri over. There are certain questions that just cannot be asked in certain cultures, and the interviewers must be aware of them so that talents, as well as opportunities, are not bypassed by imposing our cultural views of what is right on others who have been reared with a different cultural bias.

Diagnosis:

- How do you handle change at your company?
- When people do not respond to your company’s expectations with regard to change management, what technique do you use?
- Are your H.R. directors aware of the cultural differences at play when interviewing candidates from foreign countries?
3.7 Work and Life Balance: Career-Driven vs. *Joie-de-Vivre*

According to Gloria, a U.S. software engineer-turned-project manager, her frustration with her European colleagues is the main reason she resigned a few years ago from the job and went back to coding. She also switched companies, making sure her team members would be exclusively North American, Japanese, South Korean, or Taiwanese. In short, Gloria had developed an allergy to countries that are not so focused on work as she is. In her view, the expectation of her being in charge of delivering results while her counterparts were either on religious holidays, four-week vacations (during which they would refuse to check their hand devices or answer any urgent emails), or simply not interested in working on the weekend because the weekend was “sacred” to them was unrealistic. Moreover, Gloria was puzzled by the lack of interest most Europeans had toward money. In Gloria’s world, no one declines a promotion that has a bigger dollar sign attached to it. Everyone understands that work comes first, including the family. In Europe, where health, education, and nursing care are part of the benefits citizens reap by paying taxes, making more money is not always that appealing to employees. All it does is push them into a higher tax bracket. Financial security is not people’s concern in countries like France, Germany, and the U.K. The concern is to have a healthy life balance where people have plenty of time to enjoy life with friends and family.

Large U.S. multinationals have, however, struggled with the concept of work and life balance for quite some time now, with U.S. employees being burnt out to the point of becoming professionally inefficient and managers witnessing families falling apart due to work overload. The concept of “work-life integration” (IBM) or “work-life effectiveness” (Intel) remains a challenge in cultures where natural boundaries do not exist between the two concepts and no labor law enforces a maximum amount of hours worked.

But the U.S. is not the only country with a work and life balance problem. In Japan, it is common to read in the newspaper that another executive or employee died of *karōshi*: death by overwork. It is an honorable death that proves that the person had the right priorities in mind throughout his or her life.

In Brazil – a country that focuses on *joie-de-vivre* (the concept that life must be enjoyed to its fullest through pleasurable activities) – the obituary reads that too many nights of drinking and sleep deprivation resulted in death from *carnival*. Dying from over-indulging in the Brazilian culture is a noble death as well, showing that the person had life enjoyment in mind and lived without any regrets.

Looking at the map, we notice that in the following countries people live to work:

- China, Japan, the United States
- Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan

In the following countries, career and joie-de-vivre make for a balancing act:

- Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine, the U.K., Vietnam

In these countries, people work so they can enjoy life:

- Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Qatar, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey
- Norway, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates
GLOBAL VIEW OF WORK AND LIFE BALANCE

In an interview with Salon Magazine, Thomas Geoghegan, a U.S. labor lawyer in Chicago and author of a book on work-life balance, stated, “European social democracy – particularly Germany’s – offers some tantalizing solutions to our overworked age. In comparison to the U.S., the Germans live in a socialist idyll. They have six weeks of federally mandated vacation, free university tuition, nursing care, and childcare.” An article in the English edition of The Epoch Times points out “an average American full-time employee works 1,804 hours per year, while an average German works 1,436 hours. This equals to Americans working an extra nine hours every week.”

That said, many U.S. nationals tend to calculate their output based on their GDP, convinced that as a whole their country is much more efficient than the rest of the world. A map compiled by and published in The Economist, shown below, shatters that belief. Indeed, no U.S. state produces an equivalent GDP to the one of Germany.

Source: based on the work of Hofstede, Lewis, Solomon & Schell, and Berset-Price
The challenge at hand once again comes from the limited available ability within corporations to manage those cultural differences: culturally savvy people who know how to get what is needed from employees to meet a critical deadline and to release for additional free-time in appreciation once the effort has been accomplished. Creating awareness within corporations that work and life balance will ultimately serve the company better and yield nonnegligible monetary results is important. No other successful Western country embodies that theory better than Germany.

**Diagnosis:**

- How is work and life balance promoted at your company?
- Are your managers aware of the cultural currents and the efficiency that derives from countries where work and life balance are well outlined?
- Will your executives be receptive to the above data, showing that efficiency can come from working less and having strict policies in place with regard to evening and weekend work?
4 The Global Manager

4.1 The Importance of Nonverbal Cues

Garrett, a software manager in charge of international teams, understood the importance of nonverbal cues when he went to India the first time. Wanting to be comfortable during his long intercontinental trip, he wore flip-flops, an old washed-out cotton T-shirt, and sweat pants on the plane. Unfortunately, upon landing in Mumbai he was informed that his luggage did not follow. The Indian manager who awaited him suggested they go shopping in the morning and buy Garrett what he would need for the coming days, which would take them outside of Mumbai. Not liking to shop and not wanting to incur any unnecessary expenses, Garrett voted against the idea of going shopping and instead asked the hotel to wash his travel attire.

To the protest of his Indian counterpart, who was wearing a suit and a tie, Garrett climbed in the car wearing his lounge clothes, thinking that anyone would have compassion for him. After all, this was beyond his control: his luggage was missing. Unfortunately, the Indian client did not show much compassion for Garrett’s presentation skills. The Indian client felt offended that the U.S. vendor would not consider investing in some decent clothes to show up at a business meeting. As a result, the President and CFO did not join them for the meeting, and nothing was accomplished through Garrett’s trip.

At first, Garrett could not believe that his sweatpants and flip-flops could be responsible for the cold reception he received in India. After all, in Redmond, Wash., his home base, an attire of sweatpants, shorts, and T-shirts is practically a uniform for employees and managers alike...and no one cares. What Garrett did not know is that outside the United States, the stratification of cultures is often hierarchic (see chapter 3.1). As such, managers in a country such as India are normally issued from the upper class of that culture. Many went to boarding school where they were groomed to make a perfect first impression through their nonverbal cues, aware that it does make a significant difference in the society in which they evolve.

It is thus of high importance to take the time to groom global managers and subject them to the training that will ensure good table manners, adequate packing strategies, polite communication style, etc. For example, Garrett should never have traveled in sweat pants and flip-flops. Indeed, while traveling employees represent the company for which they work and should be aware of the importance of making a good impression on their fellow travelers. Garrett should have been able to pull off a professional look, thereby creating value for his employer out of the expensive overseas trip he undertook on behalf of his company.

A similar experience made a competitor of Garrett’s company aware that employees engaged in international endeavors needed to be groomed in cross-cultural table manners. A large contract was lost because one of the managers went to Abu Dhabi not realizing that using his left hand to serve himself off a plate would be considered the equivalent of a foreigner spitting in the soup in the United States. He concluded his stay by putting his feet on the desk, exposing the soles of his feet to the rest of the team. As a result, the contract was given to a European firm and communication with the U.S. ceased. Helping employees, especially the ones who did not benefit from living abroad and learning a foreign language, to build a global mindset and learn how to lead with cultural intelligence is essential in the 21st century.

Diagnosis:
- What selection process does your company have in place to ensure that the right people represent the company’s interests across cultures?
- What kind of cultural training does your company provide to employees who enter the global arena?
Does your company offer one-on-one coaching for employees who show frustration while engaged across cultures?

4.2 English as a Universal Language

Another great source of tension and misunderstanding comes from the assumption that anyone who speaks English at a certain level of fluency understands the cultural values that come with it. In the United States, a country formed primarily of monolingual and mono-cultural citizens with a rate of passport application of 33%, not enough professionals understand the challenge it represents to non-English speakers to learn the language to a level of fluency. Professionals who come from countries where the alphabet is entirely different and where exposure to English is limited have it especially tough.

In the experience of the author, a nonnative English speaker, understanding a culture’s idioms and learning its innuendos and metaphors are without a doubt the most challenging part of becoming fluent. International business people should remember that as a native English speaker, the responsibility is to limit the number of sports analogies and metaphors that are rooted strictly in the culture. For example, as of today only the U.S., Burma, and Liberia keep using the Imperial System. All others use the Metric system. As such, counting in yards is meaningless to the rest of the world.

American football is also an anomaly in the world, as other cultures play rugby or soccer rather than football. Informing a Chinese person that you expect her “not to fumble the ball,” “not to just punt,” “to get the first down,” “to pound the rock,” or “to quit dancing and run North” will probably make little sense to her, as she will not know American football rules. She will thus probably not be able to deliver the anticipated results due to your lack of clarity.

People for whom English is an acquired language will often:
- Have an accent
- Make mistakes
- Say things without realizing what they mean
- Have different cultural values
- Have different religious beliefs
- Have a hard time admitting they did not understand you

To meet non-English speakers halfway, do the following:
- Speak clearly
- Speak at a pace that is not too fast and not too slow either
- Avoid metaphors and slang
- Use common words
- Remove the contraction from your speech
- Be patient; repeat your message differently when needed
- Be grateful; realize that your interlocutor is making an effort to communicate with you in perhaps your only language
- Don’t operate on assumptions
- Have a good sense of humor

Diagnosis:
- Are your employees aware of the above language-related recommendations?
- Are your employees encouraged and financially supported in taking classes in a foreign language?
- Are your employees and executives making a conscious effort to include and engage nonnative English speakers?
4.3 Grooming Global Managers

In the past 20 years, technology has advanced very quickly. Thanks to technology and especially the Internet, everyone is now able to interact instantaneously with people located on the other end of the earth with minimal (if any) difficulties. This technological ease of communication often makes everyone forget that only technology has evolved so quickly. Humans are still pretty much locked in the cultures from which they come.

The technological improvements have paved the way for a global community where tolerance and respect for each other’s differences is instilled. Thomas Friedman, made everyone believe a few years ago that from now on the world would be flat and that everything would be handled the same way the world over. Anyone invested in managing people across cultures will find this hard to believe. It is, however, true that travel, as well as academic and professional exchanges between countries, will become more and more prevalent and thus allow people to recognize and admit the cultural differences. As such, they will develop an awareness of others, resulting in a flexibility of the mind that will permit easier communication and greater accomplishments while remaining rooted in their own cultural values.

Admitting that becoming a global professional is the challenge of many in the 21st century, let us analyze the traits a global manager embodies, also referred to throughout this document as a “global bridger:”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learns quickly in new context</th>
<th>Knows how to build partnerships</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates with ease</td>
<td>Embraces multiculturalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floats seamlessly between cultural dimensions</td>
<td>Speaks more than one language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens to others</td>
<td>Has established network in-country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has lived abroad</td>
<td>Respects people’s religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences others</td>
<td>Speaks with a global voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows business culture in-country</td>
<td>Xenocentrist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Armed with these traits and skills, global managers will earn respect from multicultural team members. In them, they will find understanding and respect for their cultures, which is at the base of any cross-cultural partnerships.

Diagnosis:

- How do you recruit global managers?
- Does your company have a policy of positive discrimination for international experience and abilities?
- Is cross-border experience part of your management technique (short-term visit, short-term transfer, long-term posting)?

Conclusion

Developing a global mindset is a journey, not a destination. Becoming a global bridger is a conscious decision that will enhance your life and the ones of others around you who come from different cultures. Actively working on developing the skills discussed throughout this paper will allow you to look at situations and problems from different angles, and ask questions around the concept of intent vs. impact that otherwise may be ignored. It is indeed impossible to master the intricacies each culture displays; they are too many to remember. It is, however, possible to work toward the goal of leading one’s private and personal life with cultural intelligence by applying the simple tools discussed in this paper. We certainly hope you will find benefits to including cultural awareness in your life and that the benefit of being culturally savvy will bring richness and enjoyment to you and yours.
References

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE: What is your cultural DNA?

1. Do I believe that the invisible social layers that form society are important and must be respected at all costs, or do I perceive that the self should have the privilege to float freely among those layers?
   - Layers must be respected. I believe in hierarchy.
   - It depends. I am not entirely against layers, but there are times I wish they weren’t there.
   - Layers are unnecessary, but I am able to perform within them.
   - The self should be allowed to move freely. I am an egalitarian.

2. When at work or on vacation with a group of people, am I mostly concerned about the well-being of the group, or am I more interested in pursuing my own interests?
   - The group and its harmony are of utmost importance to me. I would never break away to do my own thing.
   - The group harmony is important, but I don’t mind doing my own thing when the group doesn’t support me.
   - Each person should be free to pursue what he or she wants. The group is a good place to which to return once I have achieved what I personally want.
   - I never go anywhere with a group. I do things on my own.

3. When I conduct business, do I tend to stick to business? Or do I favor building a relationship with the person with whom I am involved first?
   - Business is not about making friends; it’s about making money.
   - I prefer to keep business and pleasure separated.
   - People are important to me; I like a solid and pleasant relationship before I engage in doing business with someone.
   - I don’t care how much money is at stake. If I can’t bond with the person, there will be no business.

4. What is my communication style? Am I a direct person, saying what I mean? Or do I tend to avoid being confrontational, favoring an indirect style?
   - I am very direct. I dislike innuendo and metaphor. I say what I mean and then move on.
   - I prefer avoiding conflict; but if I have to make myself clear, I will.
   - I avoid conflicts. If people are not smart enough to realize what they are doing, I prefer to disengage and walk away.
   - I speak through metaphor and innuendo. If I have a message to pass, I will ask someone else to do it for me.

5. Who am I when it comes to time management? Am I punctual in meeting people and mindful of deadlines? Or do I see time management as an unnecessary imposition that I often blow?
   - Time defines me. I am always on time (or early) and perceive punctuality as a sign of respect.
   - I am okay being on time when it comes to professional obligations. But in my private life, I am much looser with time.
   - My friends and colleagues have learned to deal with my inability to be on time. I am always late.
   - I don’t care about time. In my culture, we create time as needed; what has not been accomplished today will be accomplished another time.

6. How do I deal with change? Is change something necessary that allows me to evolve and that I embrace? Or is change something that I resent and dread?
   - Bring it on! Change is what keeps me alive. I love to learn new things and don’t mind making mistakes as I learn.
   - Change is all right if I have plenty of time to adjust to it.
   - I don’t like change. I like to know that I am in control and that I master what is expected of me.
   - I resent change. It brings to my life the possibility of failing and losing face. I like to keep things the way they are.

7. Do I live to work, or do I work to live?
   - I love my job. My job defines who I am. I wouldn’t know who I am if I didn’t have my career.
   - I accept the fact that my personal life is dictated by my professional obligations.
   - My job is important, but I must have balance between my private and professional life.
   - I go to work so I can afford all the pleasant escapes life offers. My job is a necessary evil.