



# Interacting in an intercultural professional context

*Brigitte Ernst, inspired by the presentation of  
Caroline Grisard, ULiège Euraxess Service Centre,  
R&D department, 21 June 2022*

# Context

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- more travels, more [virtual] exchanges between countries & people
- more room for potential misunderstandings
- more exposure to other cultures = more tools to understand each other



# Current labour market



## 21st century skills

### Top 10 skills

#### in 2020

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

#### in 2015




1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others
3. People Management
4. Critical Thinking
5. Negotiation
6. Quality Control
7. Service Orientation
8. Judgment and Decision Making
9. Active Listening
10. Creativity



**Learning Skills**

- Critical Thinking 
- Creativity 
- Collaboration 
- Communication 

**Literacy Skills**

- Information 
- Media 
- Technology 

**Life Skills**

- Flexibility 
- Leadership 
- Initiative 
- Productivity 
- Social 

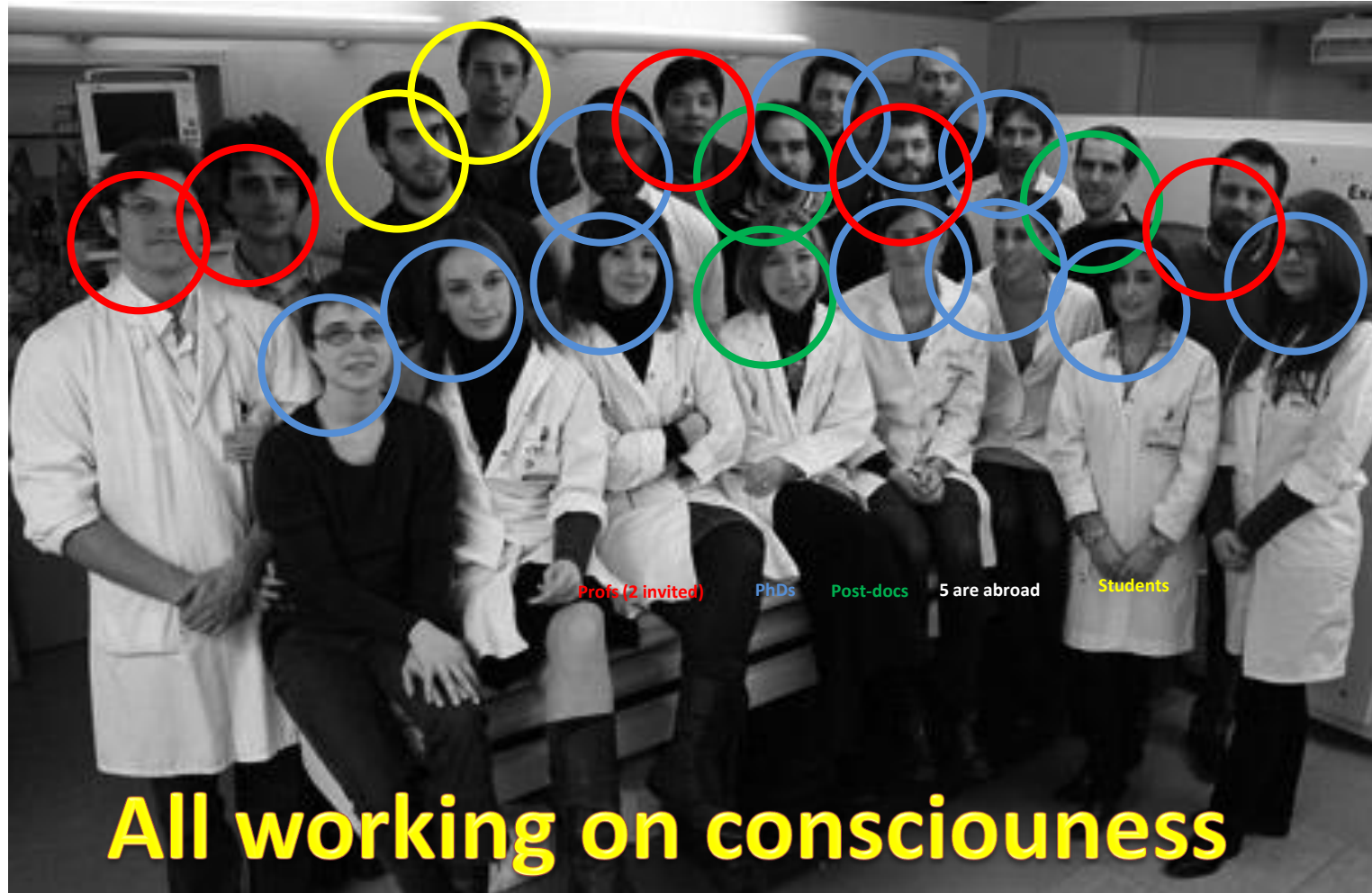
Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

# You don't want to be rude?

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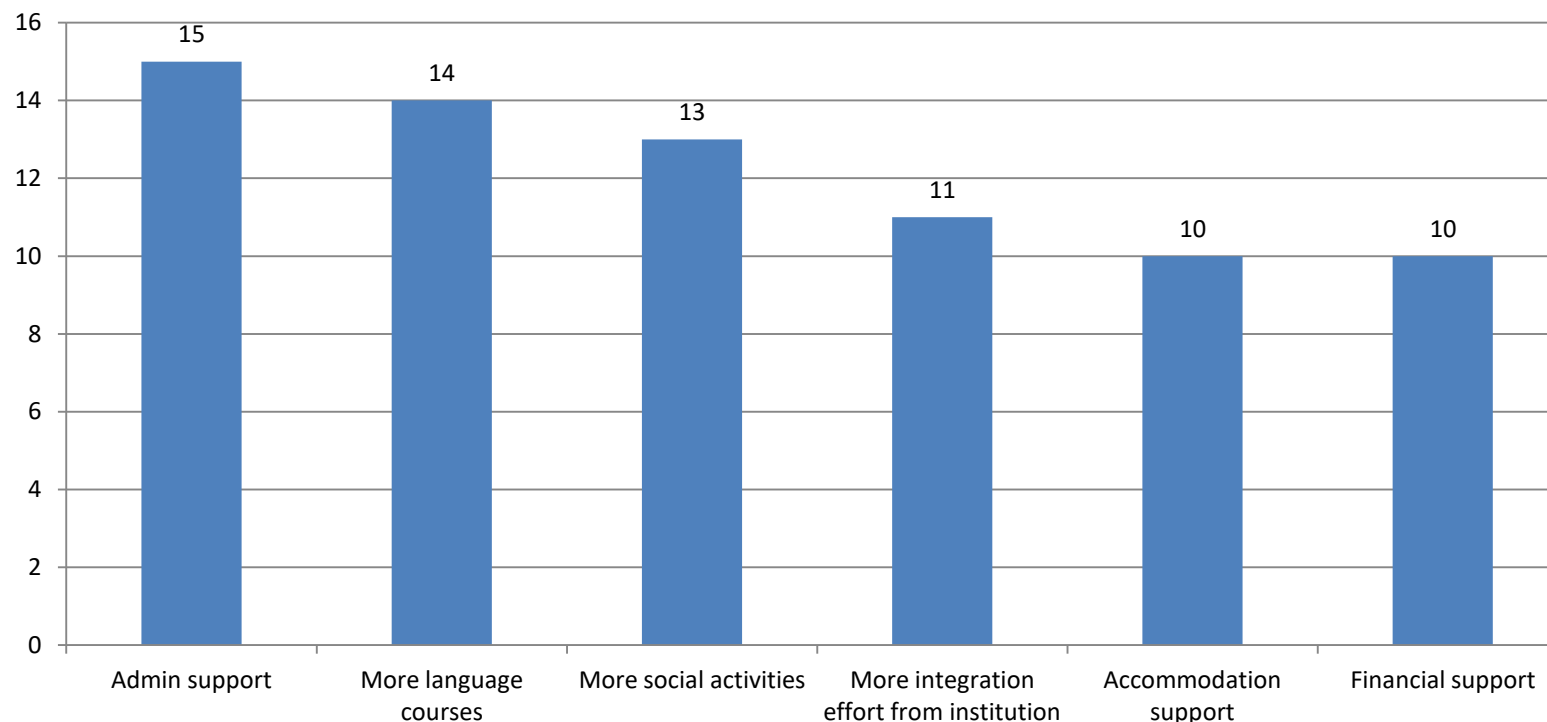


# What's the difference ?

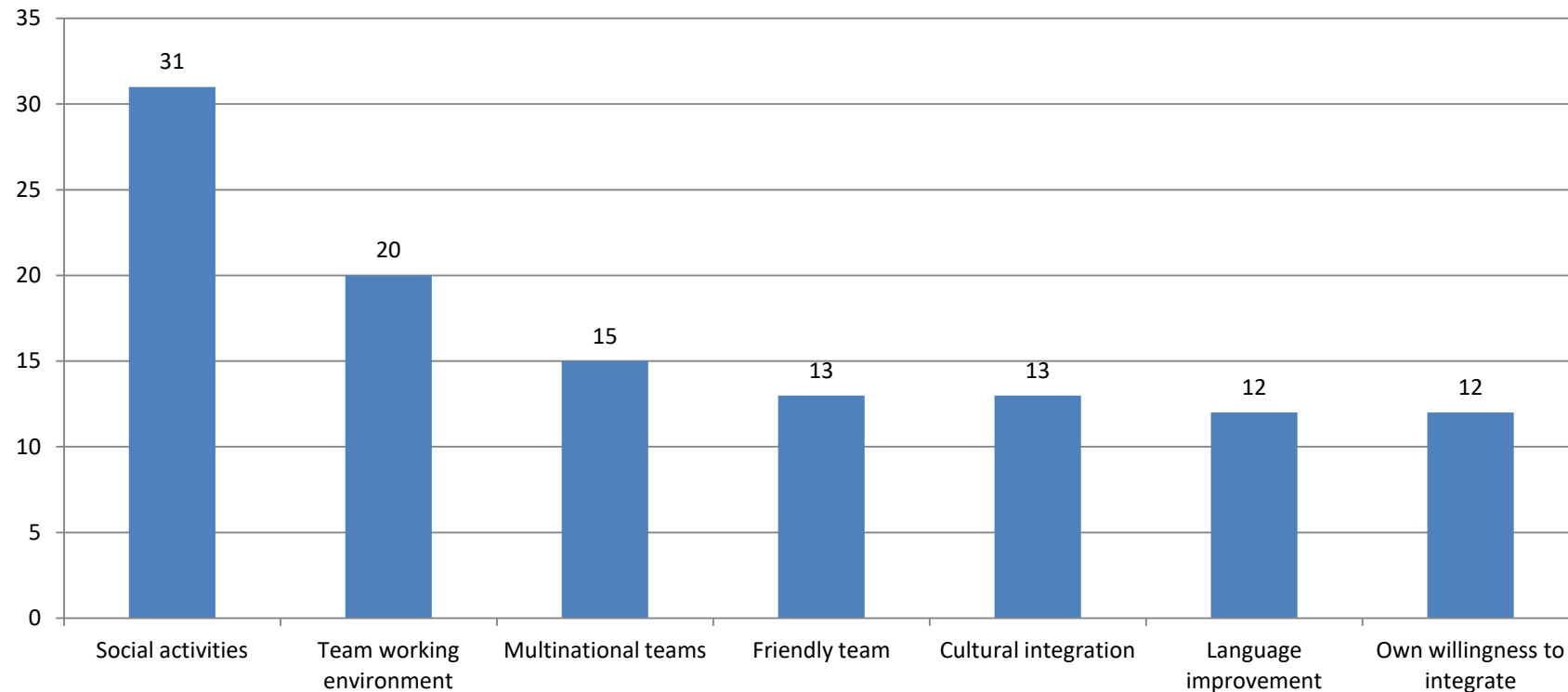


**All working on consciousness**

# Factors mobile researchers missed when integrating into a new environment



# Factors mobile researchers appreciated in their integration into a new environment.



# When you have time ...

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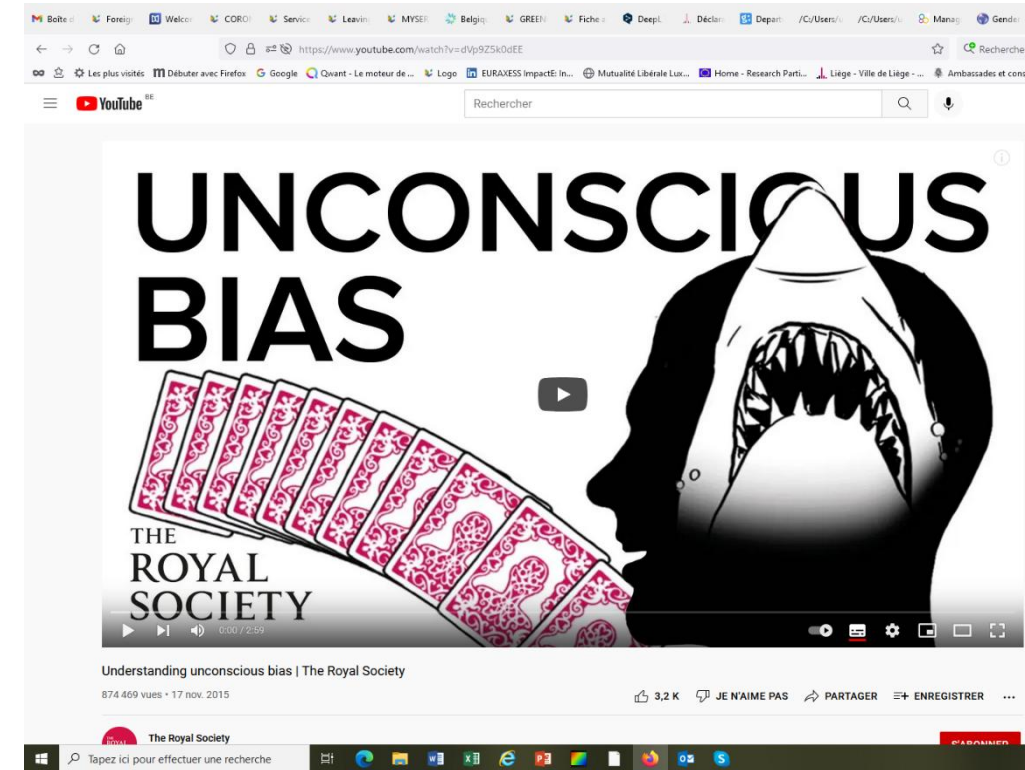
- Watch this 3 minutes video from the Royal society UK :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE>

- Take 5 minutes to make one of these IAT tests *(not limited to gender)*:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

- Share with us and other Euraxess colleagues interesting tools, references, examples like these used in your own institution!





# How about the IAT ?

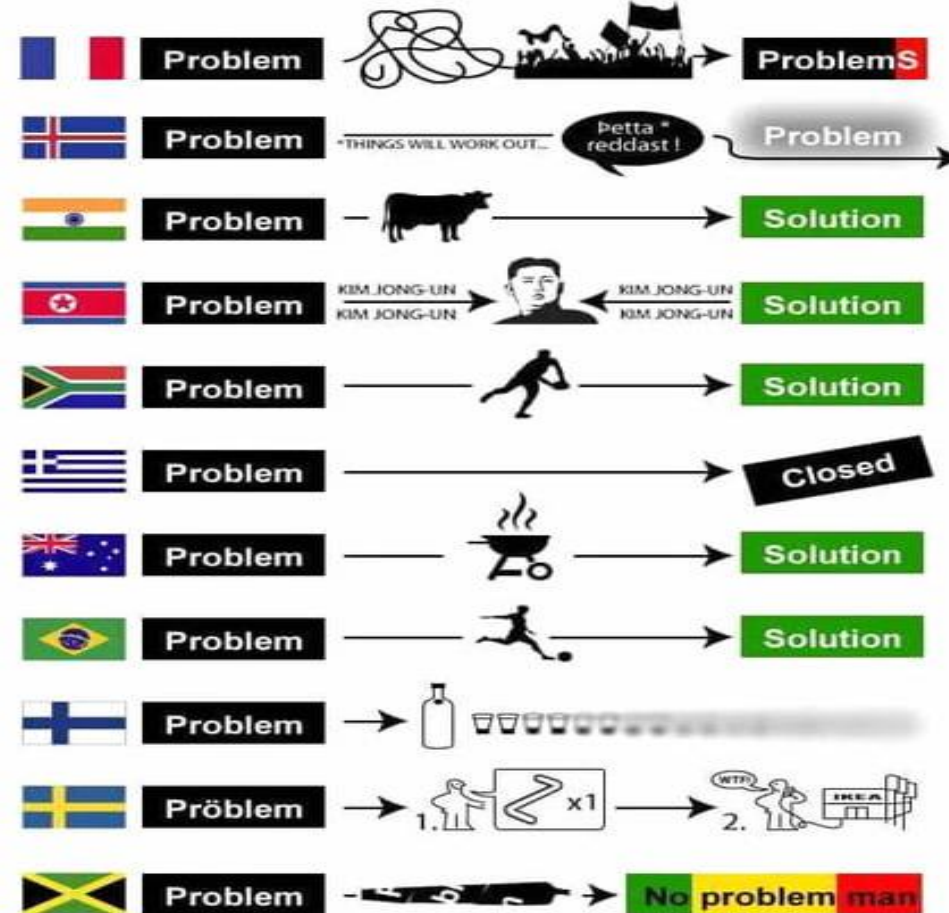
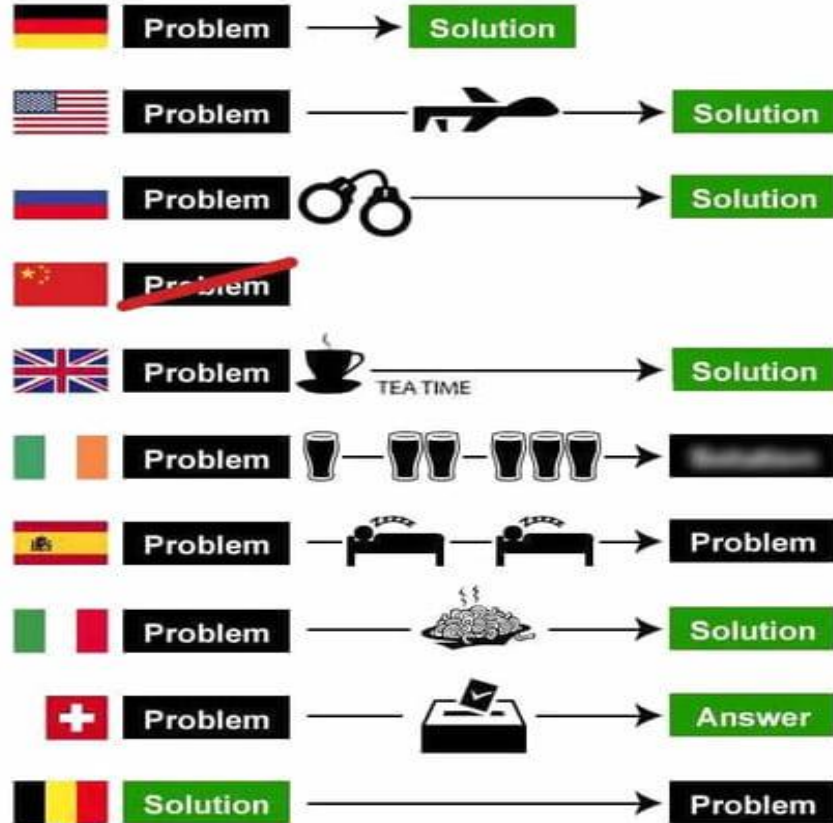
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- A **stereotype** is a a prior assumption many people have about a group, a culture or a race, which may be only partly true.
- **Implicit bias** stems from our natural tendency to make associations to help us organise our social worlds. Our fundamental way of looking at and encountering the world is driven by a 'hardwired' pattern of making unconscious decisions about others, based on what feels safe, likeable, valuable, and competent.
- Most people believe that they hold **fewer biases than the average** person. Virtually every one of us is biased towards something, somebody, some group.

# Stereotypes



# INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING





From stereotypes to prejudices, from prejudices to discriminations...

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# From stereotype to prejudice

- To behave in society, our brain uses shortcuts (this is the basis for the IAT tests mentioned above)
- We use to favour what is similar to us, what we know already.
- Equality might be claimed by the statements and regulations, but it is not present in the unconscious.

# Discrimination ?

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- From categorisation : sorting information to help us behave in society
- To stereotypes : categories present in our brain, through which we interpret reality
- To prejudices : negative vision of a group based on a rigid and wrong generalization
- To discrimination : negative behaviour towards this group (domination techniques)

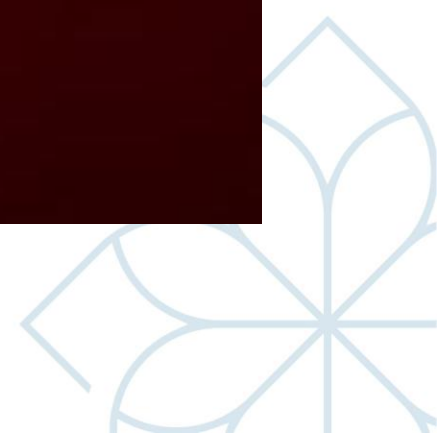
# Understanding diversity

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Understanding diversity means recognising differences and understanding that each individual is unique. Respecting each other and knowing how we are similar and different will help us to develop better human relations. We are all humans but all different, in so many ways : age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, worldviews, political affiliations, educational attainment, career, physical abilities, value base, family history.



# Q&A



# CULTURE

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*« Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society »*

**Edward B. Taylor**

*“Culture is the Software of the Mind.”*

*“Culture is an orientation system for a nation, society, organization or group. It is passed on from generation to generation. It influences perception, thinking, values and actions of all the group members and defines their membership to this group. Culture is a sub-conscious, action-influencing system of values and norms which is acquired during socialization and is shared by all members of a society and passed on to its new members.”*

**Geert Hofstede**

## Visible Culture

Language  
Food  
Music  
Dance  
Arts & crafts  
Literature  
Games

## Deep Culture

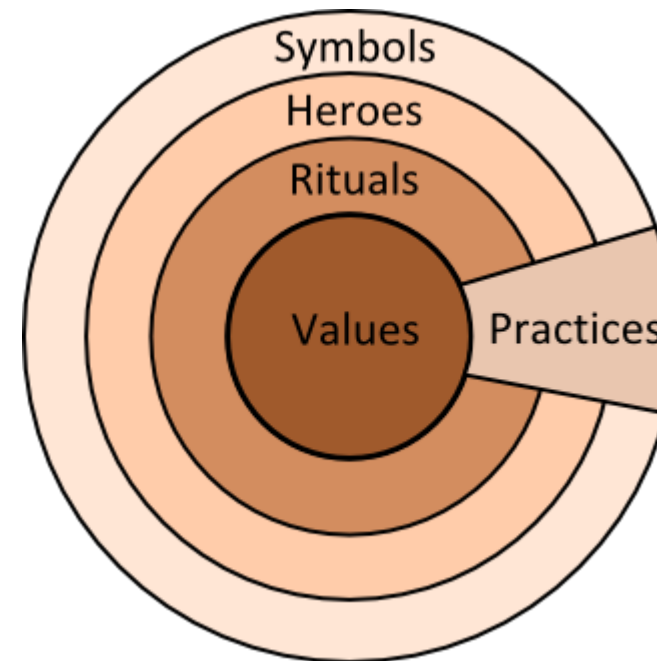
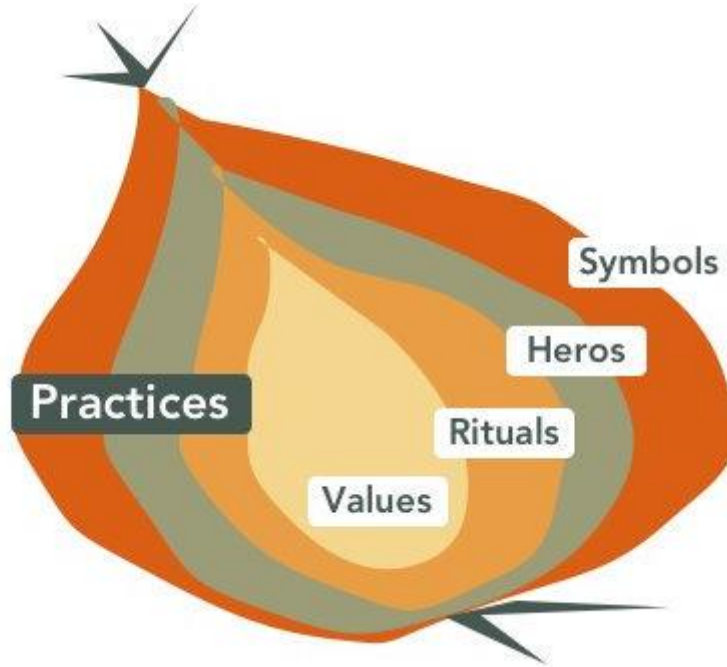
Facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, personal space, touching, body language, tone of voice, display of emotions, conversational pattern, courtesy, manners, friendship, leadership, cleanliness, modesty, beauty, self, time, past & futur, roles related to age, sex, class, family, fairness, justice, expectations, work, authority, animals, sin, death, religion, courtship, marriage, raising children, decision making, problem solving...

**Iceberg model**

Edward T. Hall

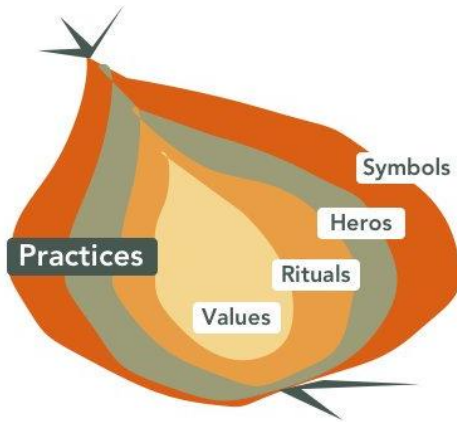
# Onion model - Hofstede

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# Onion model - Hofstede

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## Values

- *Tendency to prefer some situations*
- *Positively or negatively oriented*
- *Learnt from the earliest days*

## Rituals

- *Recurring events*
- *Shape our unconscious mind*

## Heroes

- *Public figures, alive or not, fictional or not*
- *Very appreciated features*
- *Inspiring behaviours*

# Culture classification

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- 3 models to classify cultures
  - Florence Kluckhohn & Fred Strodtbeck
  - Edward T. Hall
  - Geert Hostede

# Florence Kluckhohn & Fred Strodtbeck

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## Relation to nature

- Harmony
- Exploitation

## Human activity

- Live to work
- Work to live

## Relation to space

- Private
- Shared

## Relation to others

- Collectivism
- Individualism

## Human nature belief

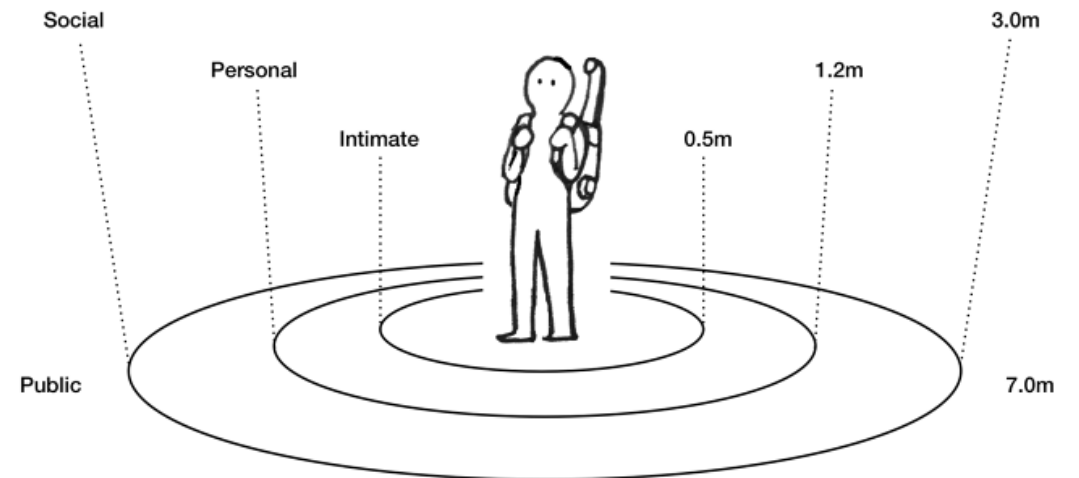
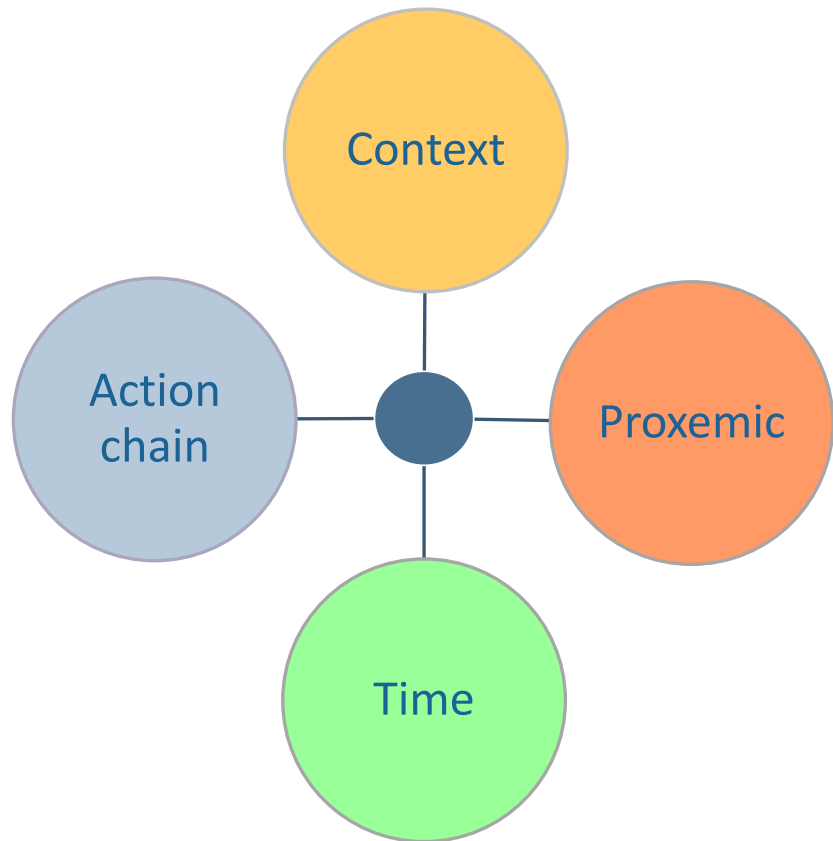
- Trust
- Suspicion

## Relation to time

- Past
- Present
- Future

# Edward T. Hall

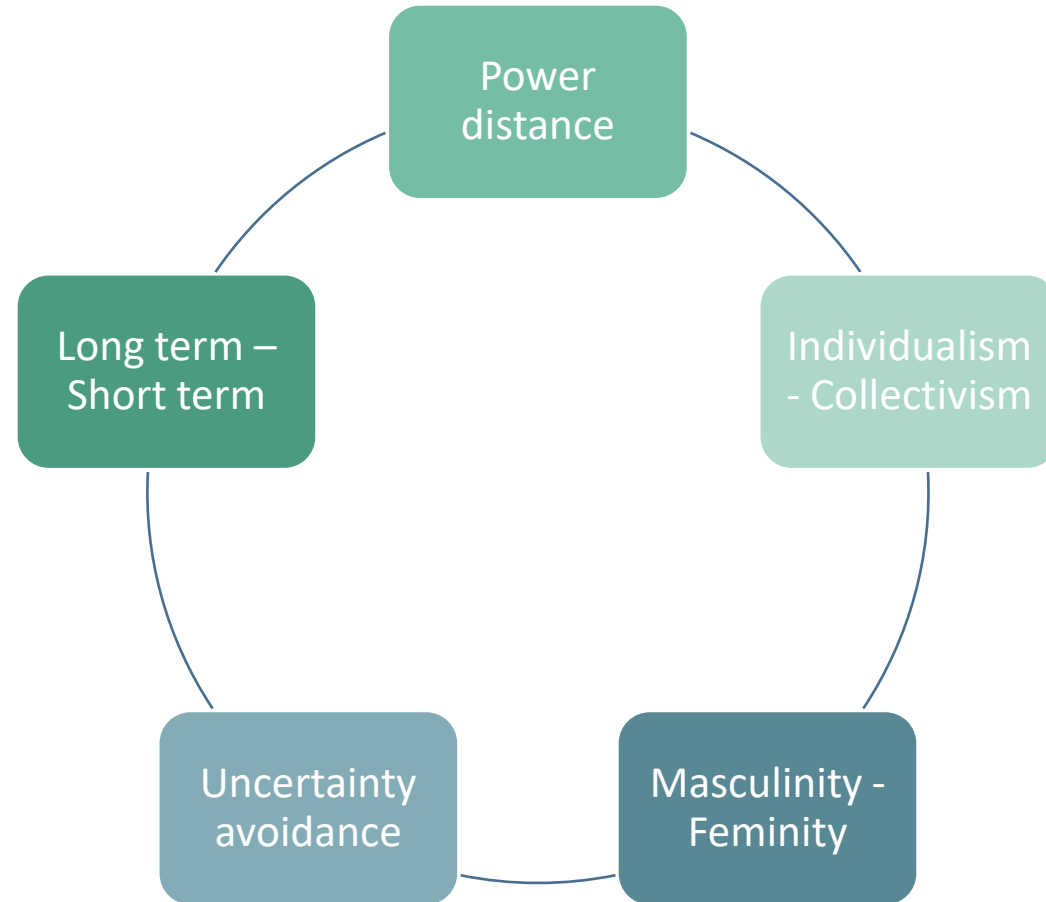
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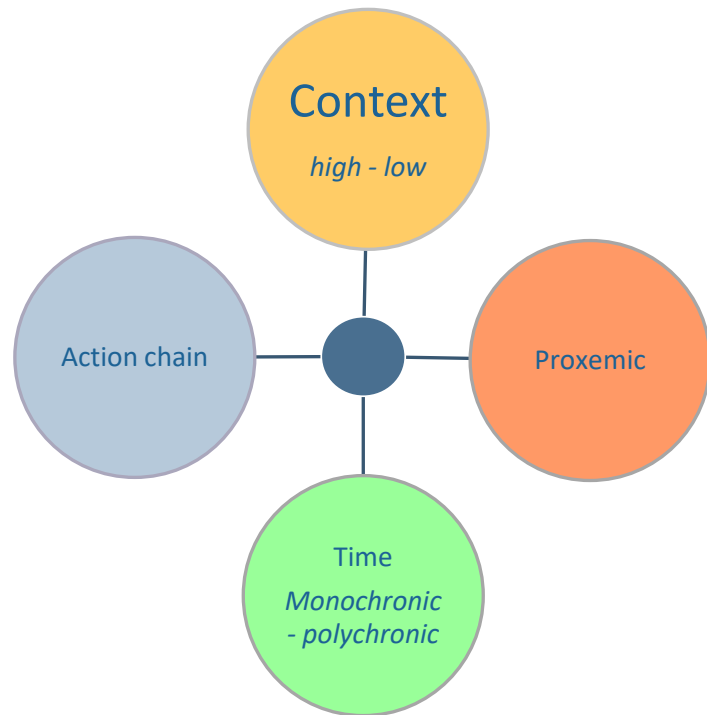
# Geert Hofstede

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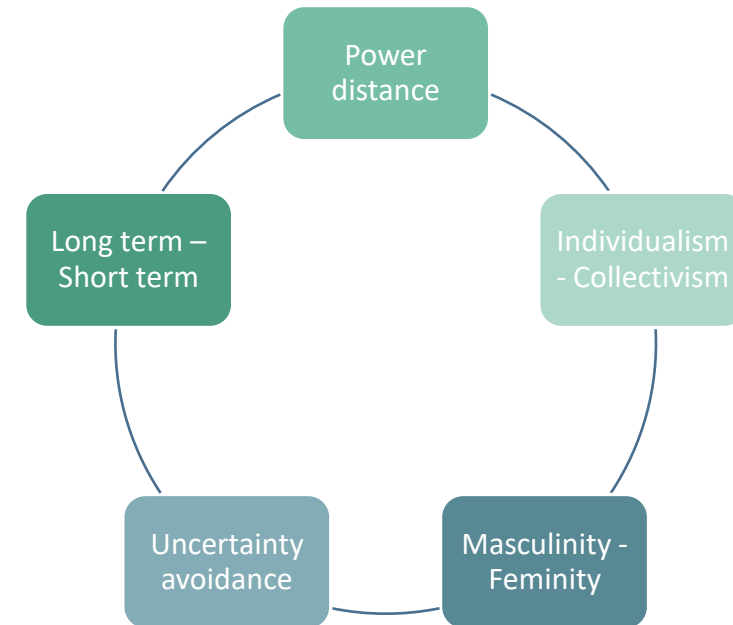




# Classify your culture



<b>Relation to nature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Harmony</li><li>• Exploitation</li></ul>	<b>Human activity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Live to work</li><li>• Work to live</li></ul>	<b>Relation to space</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Private</li><li>• Shared</li></ul>
<b>Relation to others</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collectivism</li><li>• Individualism</li></ul>	<b>Human nature belief</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trust</li><li>• Suspicion</li></ul>	<b>Relation to time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Past</li><li>• Present</li><li>• Future</li></ul>



# The 4 layers of diversity

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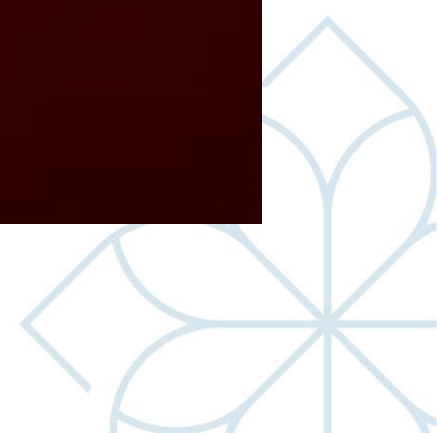
The FOUR LAYERS OF DIVERSITY model created by Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003)

# The 4 layers of diversity

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- **Personality (1st layer)** shows how a person interacts with others and what his/her characteristics are, whether s/he is an introvert, ambivert or extrovert, active or passive, a fast and dynamic doer or a silent and reflective thinker etc., and how all these aspects together affect the way the person is treated by others.
- **Internal dimensions (2nd layer)** are based on six aspects that an individual possibly cannot choose or control him/herself, i.e. they are given: age, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, ethnicity and race. These aspects influence how the person is treated when s/he is dealing with diversity in communication and interaction with others.
- **External dimensions (3rd layer)** depict the outcomes of life experiences and decisions/choices taken. Altogether there are ten different areas (such as education, work experience, income, marital status, ... ) through which people can be appreciated or degraded, connected or disconnected depending on how exactly these aspects are seen and applied.
- **Organisational dimensions (4th layer)** include elements that are integrated into work and social interaction in an organization/at a work place. They contain a number of hierarchical as well as functional aspects of working life and how a person relates to them in the context of diversity.

# Q&A





*COMMUNICATION*

# Through a filter...

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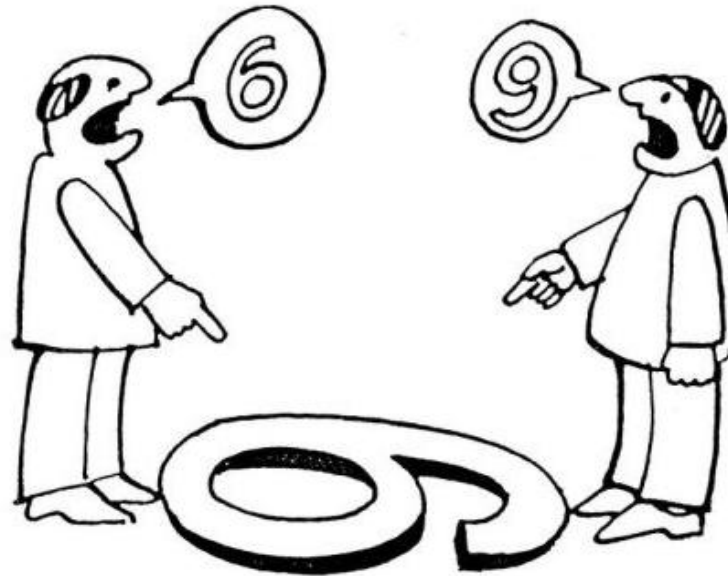
Culture is like a filter through which you look at the world, the life and all the interactions between people.



# Different points of view

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To understand the others, you have to try put yourself in their shoes, learn what kind of glasses they wear...





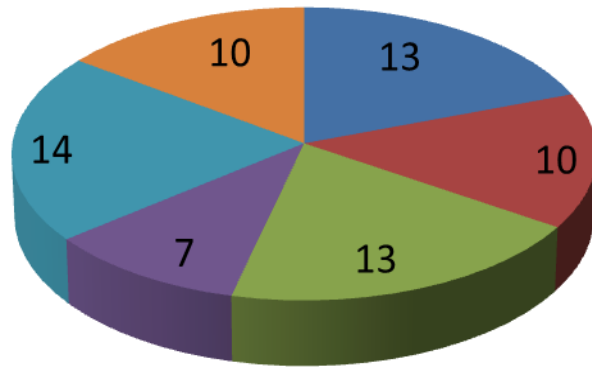
ImpactE project survey in 2015 :464  
answers from Indian and Chinese  
researchers were analyzed

- Everyday communication with people and food related issues are the biggest inconveniences for both nationality groups
- The organizational culture at work and language is slightly more difficult for Chinese than for Indian researchers.

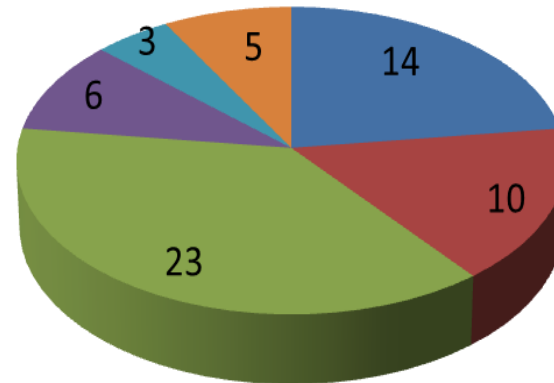
Cultural specifics they find/found difficult - total 454	
Chinese - 175	Indian - 279
Positive to local specifics (Ireland was mentioned by many in very positive manner in Comments.	Positive to local specifics (very open to other cultures - consider nice learning other specifics, Ireland was mentioned by many in very positive manner in Comments.)
Language - Language in French speaking and some other countries - no English in everyday communication with people is a great difficulty	Language - Language in French speaking and some other countries - no English in everyday communication with people is a great difficulty
Greetings (mostly kissing in French speaking countries)	Greetings (kissing in French speaking countries, hugs and hand shaking, formal and informal greetings and hierarchy)
Everyday communication with people and way of communication (too direct)	Everyday communication with people and way of communication (no emotion and meaning in greeting "Hello, 'morning, etc., no direct speaking in UK)
Social communication and topics of social communication (not usual for Chinese - death for instance, lack of working topics in social meeting, jokes and local sense of humor)	Social communication and topics of social communication (Germans, Norwegians, Czechs are difficult to make friends, people are more formal and less frank, Indifference )
Free time related (too much free time, parties as a whole not traditional in China, party culture, no work on weekends, etc.)	Free time related (afterwork socialising, no need of so long coffee breaks, early and long lasting dinner, parties, dressing, total closure on weekends, jokes and local sense of humor, planning everything)
Time management (need of appointment for everything)	Time management
Organizational culture at work (no nap at noon, punctuality, high level of efficiency - Chinese usually work more hours with lower efficiency)	Organizational culture at work (punctuality, early start hours, to address your supervisor with their first name, People having superiority complex, multitasking, planning every little thing )
Chinese Other - 1-3 answers  <b>Gender issue is mentioned by 7-8 Chinese (mostly female)</b>  Too much emotions , Work planning , Everything = Culture shock, Individualism of the local culture, Meanings of gestures , Rules during eating - too much talking or too quiet in other countries	<b>Racism is mentioned by more than 15 Indians (both female and male)</b>  Friendship, openness to people or strangers, Materialism and no emotions in communication with people, The difficulties are rather social and political, and such cultural niceties distort real issues, Prejudice most of the people have about India, Lack of on-line information in France, Cleaning the nose with big sound when there are people around, No social,

# What could be changed to facilitate integration of researchers in Europe ?

## Indian [%]



## Chinese [%]

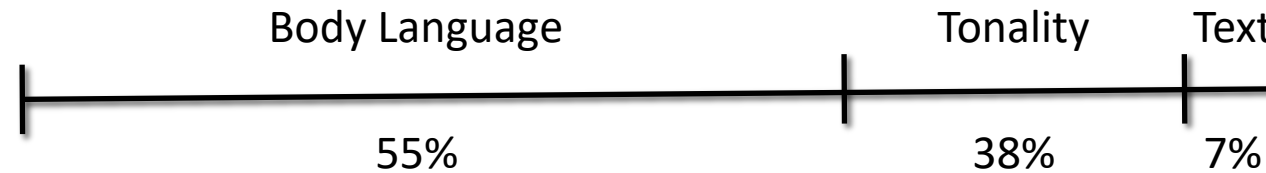


- Help with language/ English in Europe/
- Explain European Culture and Tradition/Cross-Cultural Meetings/International Centres
- Integration Activities/Openness/ Mutual Understanding and Respect
- Just Social Activities
- Improve Initial Set Up Process: Housing /Relocation/ Job Market/Practical info and General Welcome
- Easier Immigration/Families Together

# Not to communicate is impossible ...

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....but miscommunication is possible !



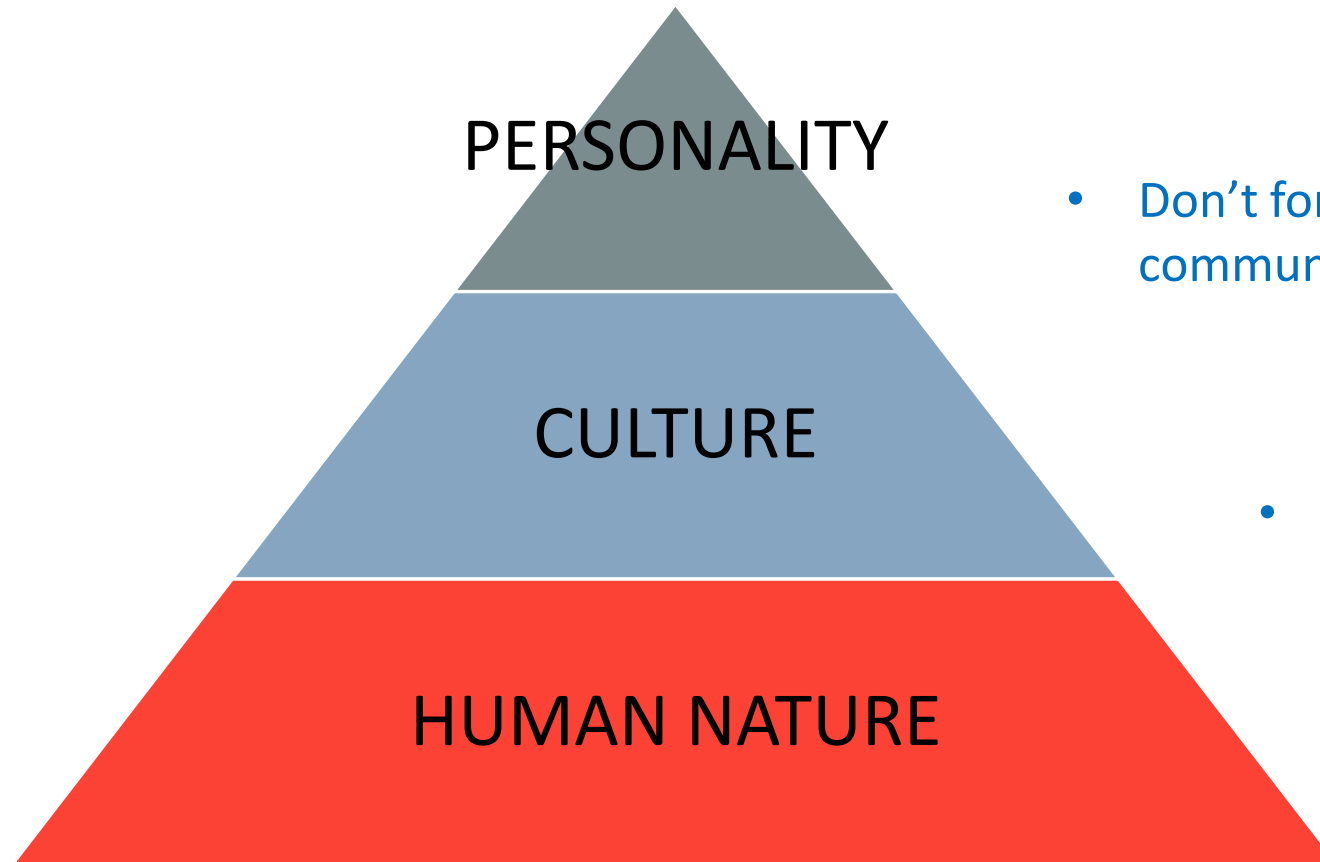
# Orchestra model of communication

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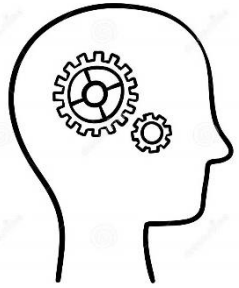


# Hofstede's pyramid

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- Don't forget the different levels when you communicate
- Focus on the interaction not the culture



# Communication behaviours



What are the communication standards in your culture? What should be avoided ?

NATION:

NATIONAL FLAG:



DO'S (behavioural norms, preferable or typical behaviours in your country, values, attitudes...)	DON'TS (unwanted or untypical behaviours in your country, taboos...)
<p>WELCOMING + HOSPITALITY <i>very welcoming, hospitable</i> <i>inviting colleagues</i></p> <p>INNOVATIVE</p> <p>CELL PHONES ON ALL THE TIME</p> <p>MELTING POT + ETHNIC DIVERSITY</p> <p>DIVERSE LANDSCAPE + CLIMATE <i>(from a cold North to desert</i> <i>- within a 5-hour</i></p> <p>CAPITAL OF ISRAEL -&gt;</p>	<p><i>Handwritten to</i></p> <p>TENDENCY TO BE OVERLY FRANK <i>(NO WORD IN HEBREW FOR "FACT")</i></p> <p>BAD DRIVING</p> <p><i>LEAVE</i></p> <p><i>WE DON'T</i></p> <p>WE ARE NOT LIVING <i>IN A WAR</i></p>

NATION: DENMARK

NATIONAL FLAG:



DO'S (behavioural norms, preferable or typical behaviours in your country, values, attitudes...)	DON'TS (unwanted or untypical behaviours in your country, taboos...)
<p>BUY A BICYCLE</p> <p>SPEND TIME WITH YOUR FAMILY <i>(work/life balance)</i></p> <p>TWO INCOMES PER HOUSEHOLD</p> <p>FREEDOM OF SPEECH</p> <p>LEARN DANISH!</p> <p>LOGIC RULES!</p> <p>SEEK CONSENSUS</p>	<p>DON'T BRAG ABOUT YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS</p> <p>DON'T SPEAK ABOUT YOUR FAITH</p> <p>DON'T ACT SUPERIOR</p> <p>DON'T EXPECT YOUR COLLEAGUES TO BECOME YOUR CLOSE FRIEND</p> <p>DON'T EXPECT ALL DANES TO BE IN FAVOUR OF THE EU</p>



NATION: **ITALIA**

NATIONAL FLAG:

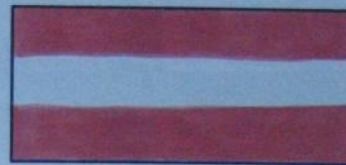


DO'S (behavioural norms, preferable or typical behaviours in your country, values, attitudes...)	DON'TS (unwanted or untypical behaviours in your country, taboos...)
CAPPUCCINO FOR BREAKFAST OR FOR MORNING BREAK	DRINK CAPPUCCINO AFTER A MEAL
ART, CULTURAL HERITAGE, OPEN AND CHEERFUL PEOPLE	PASTA, PIZZA, NATI A
FASHION AND LOOK ARE ALWAYS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT	MEN DON'T WEAR WHITE SOCKS WITH SANDALS
A "NORMAL" COUNTRY WOULDN'T <del>KIND</del> KEEP HIM FOR SO LONG	BERLUSCONI
WE DO TAGLIATELLE AL LAGO - SENSE OF HUMOUR	SPAGHETTI BOLOGNAISE

NATION:

**AUSTRIA**

NATIONAL FLAG:



DO'S (behavioural norms, preferable or typical behaviours in your country, values, attitudes...)	DON'TS (unwanted or untypical behaviours in your country, taboos...)
- at least TRY to believe that Opernball is an important event	- ask Austrians about "The Sound of Music"
- at least TRY to ski and admire downhill skiers	- say Wiener Würstchen for Frankfurter Würstchen
- at least TRY to jump from stratosphere	- think too logically

# Context Communication

## LOW-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION



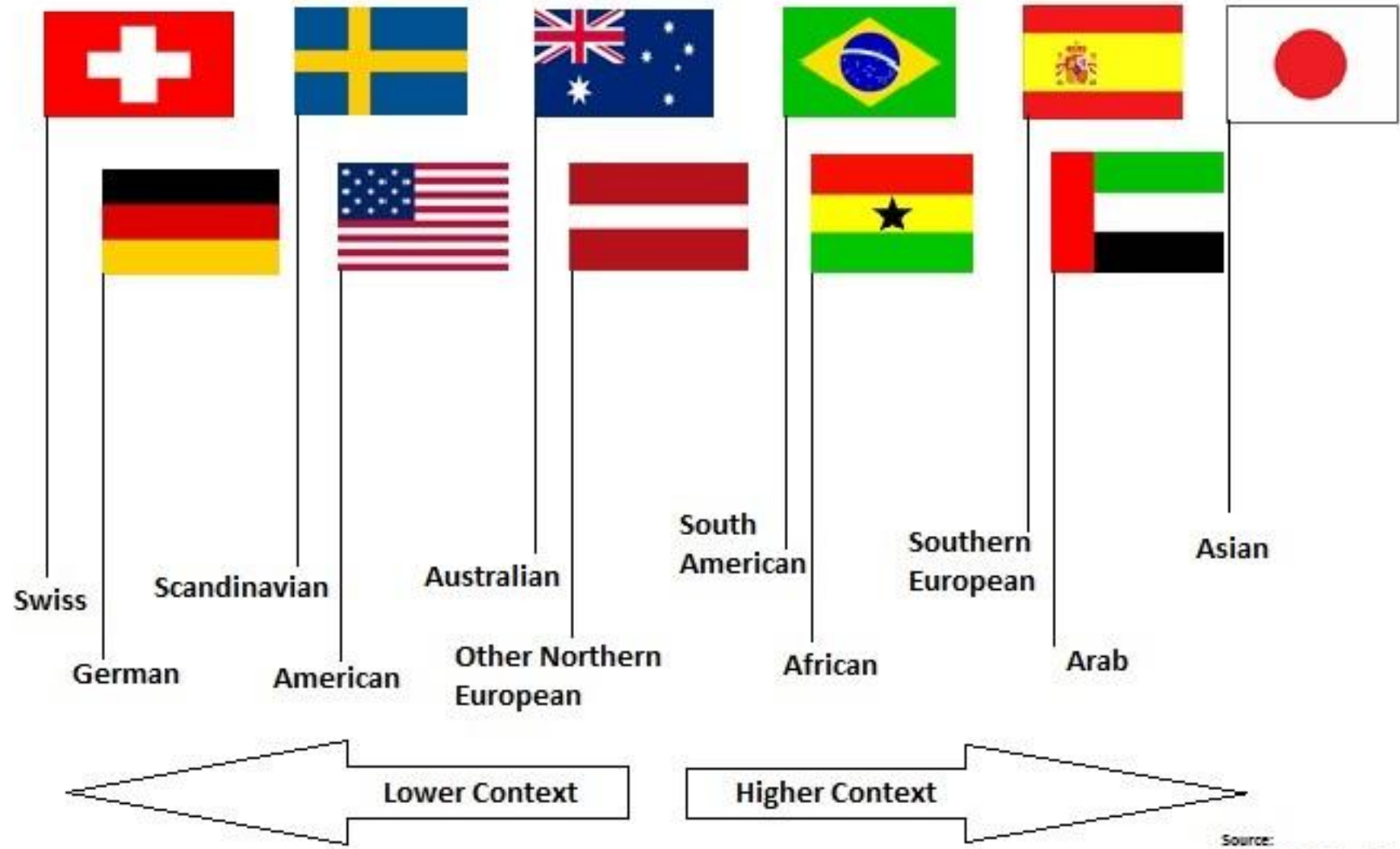
## HIGH-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION



High Context Communication: Primary purpose of communication is to form and develop a relationship; contextual information is needed

Low Context Communication: Primary purpose of communication is the exchange of information, facts and opinions

# High Context-Low Context Continuum



Source:  
Adapted by Benducci Consulting

# High vs. Low content cultures

## *FEATURES OF HIGH CONTEXT CULTURES*

- People feel responsible for their family
- Value the concept of 'face'; strong public image
- If a member's 'face' is threatened, the whole group's honour is in danger
- e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Arab

## *FEATURES OF LOW CONTEXT CULTURES*

- Independence and individualism is emphasized
- No concept of 'face'
- Everyone is responsible for themselves
- e.g. English, North American, Swiss, German



# Individualism vs Collectivism

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## Individualism

- Loosely knit social framework
- Individual ownership of resources
- Self actualization is a high goal
- Make decisions individually
- ----> Self responsibility

## Collectivism

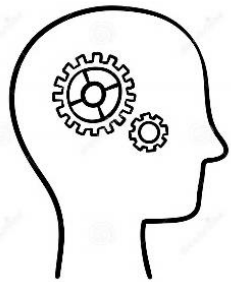
- Tightly knit social framework
- Resources are shared
- Harmony and consensus in society are the ultimate goals
- Make decisions as a group
- ----> Group responsibility



# PRACTICAL SKILLS – Meta communication

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- Communicate about your communication
- Take a bird's point of view on your way to exchange



Emotional intelligence :

- What you see, hear (the fact)
- How you interpret it
- How you feel about it

# Communication tips...

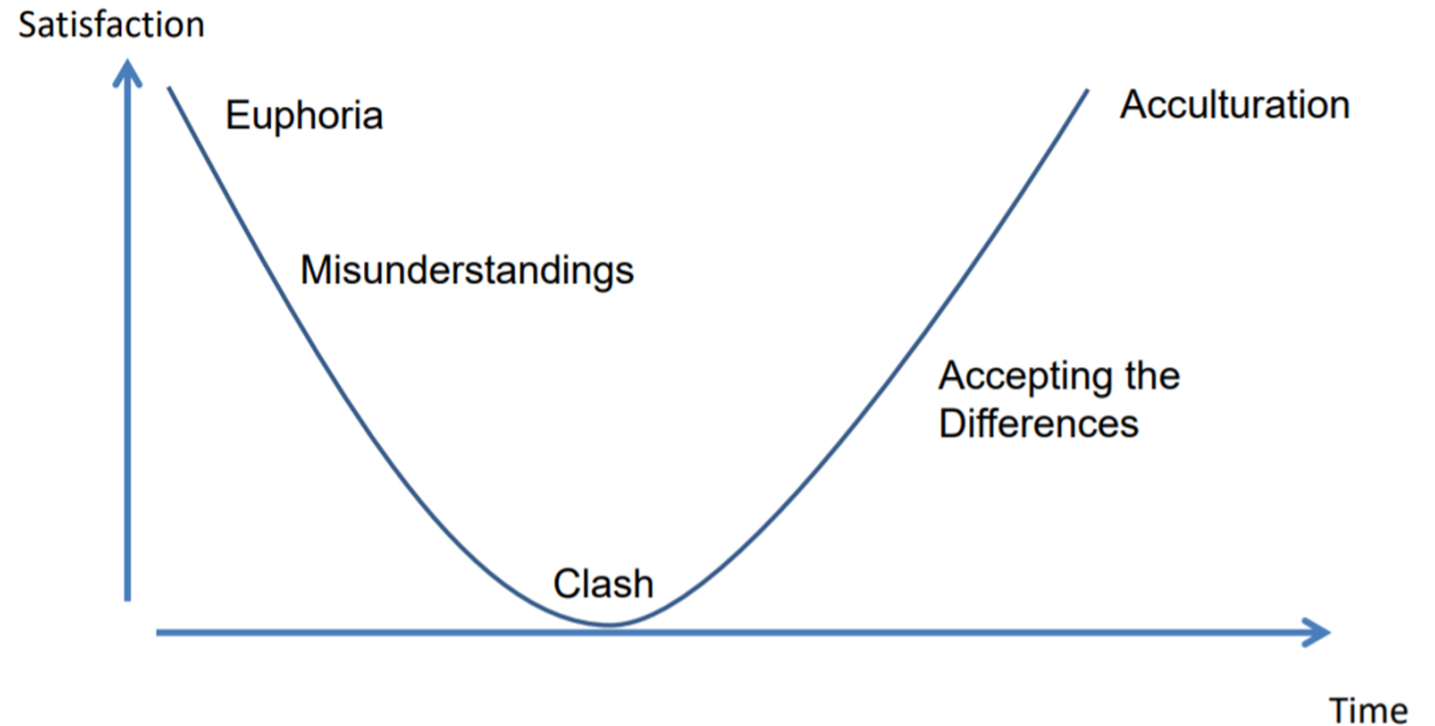
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- Writing
  - Right words
  - Short sentences
  - Essential info first then useful details
  
- Speaking
  - Likewise writing with even more simplicity
  - Specific attention to non-verbal, body language

# The Culture Shock: suggestions

- Admit it and be patient
- Discover your new surroundings and get familiar with them
- Devote time to a hobby in your new surroundings
- Make contact with your colleagues and neighbours and ask them for an “appointment”
- Eat familiar food and cook meals from home (and invite neighbours and colleagues)

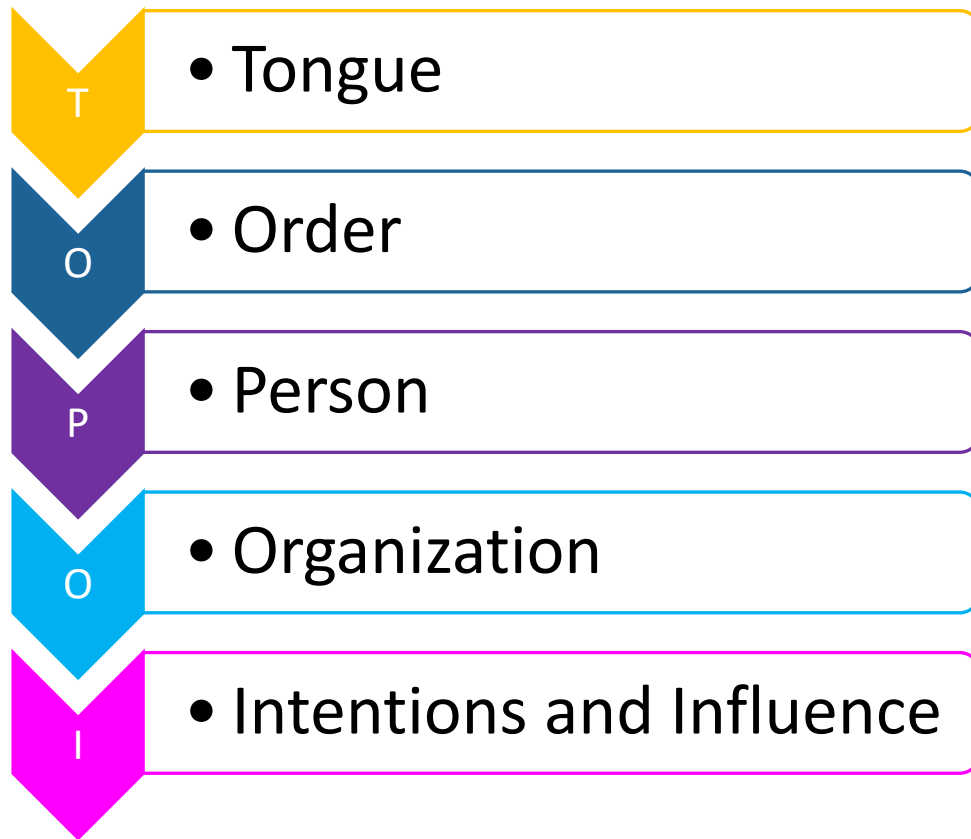
## The Culture Shock





# TOPOI model – Edwing Hoffman

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- Judgment and prejudices are unavoidable
- Have an eye for your own « cultural glasses »
- Be alert to blindmaking prejudices
- Become aware of your own assumptions (especially the ones you see as the reality)
- MY truth is not THE truth
- Look at different views, habits, values and standards

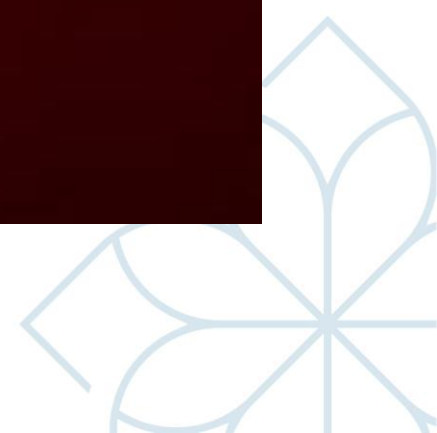
# TOPOI model – Edwing Hoffman

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- Remember that communication is a circular process in which people influence each other
  - *What am I doing so that the other acts like this?*
  - *What is the other doing so that I [re]act like this?*
  - *What is the influence of the broader context ?*
- Watch the effect, do not hang on to your (good) intentions
- Keep an open & reflective attitude
- The context has an influence
- Be sceptical about communication but optimistic about people
- Be prepared for misunderstanding and accept this is normal if it happens
- Look for the common good

**Play an active role !**

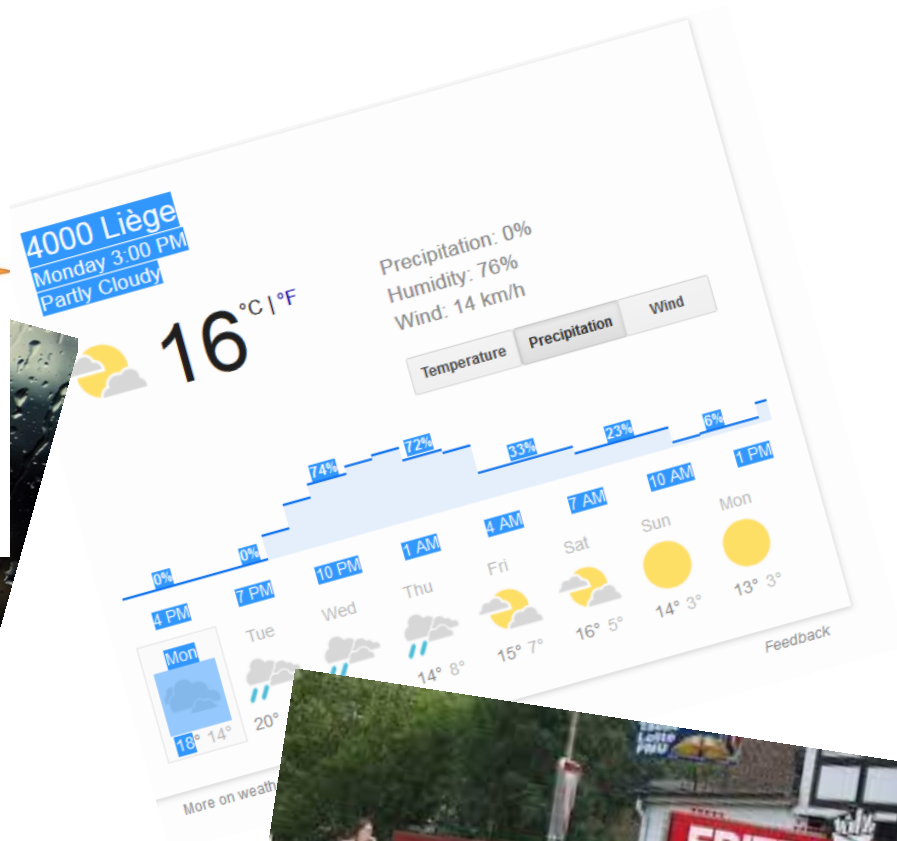
# Q&A

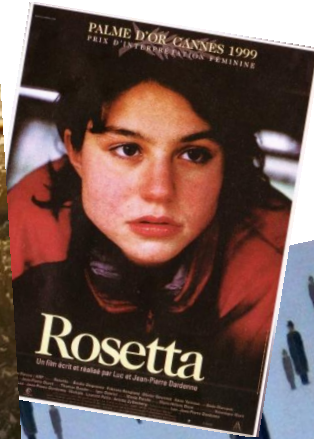


# Working in an international environment : the example of Belgium

Inspired by the presentation of Caroline Vliegen, U Mons, Understanding Belgians







*n'est pas un*



# Proxemics: Perception of Personal space in Belgium

- Social space: from 1.2m to 3.6m  
Separation from strangers, salespeople, workers or office staff
- Personal space: between 60 cm and 1m  
For good friends or colleagues
- Intimate space: less than 60 cm separation  
Closest friends, family members or partner  
Body contact allowed

# Perception of Time in Belgium

- Time = valuable in itself (spend/save/waste time)
- Structured day: ideal use of time
- Punctuality = respect (respecting the time planning of others)
- Deadlines are non-negotiable



# Communication in Belgium

- Task-oriented, is meant for exchanging information
- Direct; no hidden message
- Yes: agreement and commitment
- No: lack of agreement, not rejection of the person
- Don't be too loud -> Respect others
- Small talk is not necessary but appreciated by some people.

# Individualism in Belgium

- Independent personality with own identity, as autonomous as possible
- Having and expressing your own opinion, making your own decisions is very important
- Each person (and not the group) is responsible for their own behaviour
- Initiative within a group is valued and indeed expected
- Need help? Ask for it!

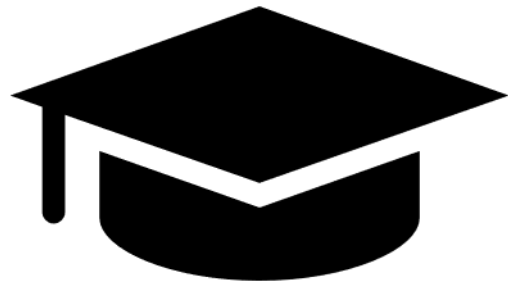
# The Belgian Cultural Standards

## *Culture standards*

*The socially shared and accepted norms and values that are used by the individuals living within a particular culture to evaluate the behavior of each other.*

- Directness of communication
- Focus on the task
- Value of structures and rules
- Reliability and avoidance of uncertainty (rule-oriented, internalised focus of control)
- Punctuality and time planning
- Separation of private and public spheres

# The academic culture in Belgium



- Few distinct levels in hierarchy, but show respect and use titles (Prof./Dr.) unless instructed otherwise
- Self responsibility: Each individual must take care of his/her business (accommodation, meeting deadlines, etc.)
- Ideally, the Supervisor is an expert in his field and also a facilitator who helps you to develop your own ideas
- Thesis = dialogue of constructive criticism
- Room for discussion, student's opinion counts

# Ressources

- <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>
- <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/intercultural-assistant>



*Conclusions ?*

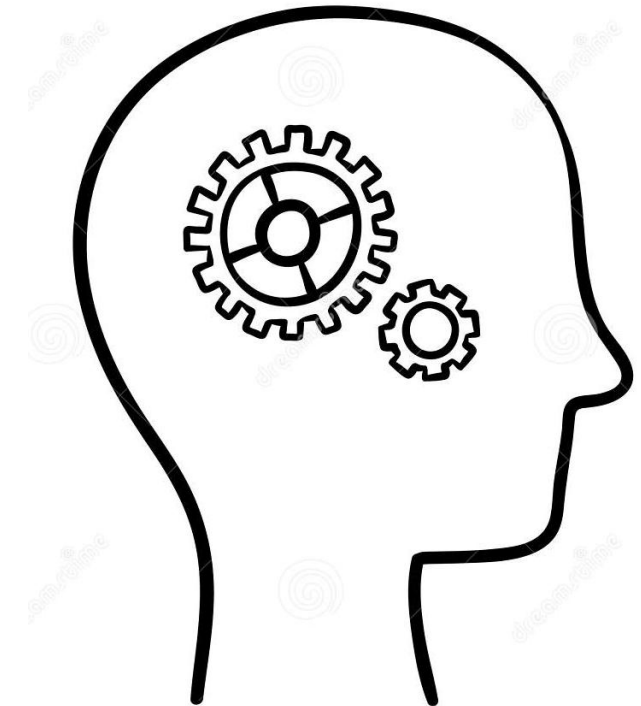
# Stereotypes & corporate culture

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Questions to foreign PHD students :

What stereotypes about the ULiège, a Belgian University, did you have before coming?

How would you describe the ULiège corporate culture & your department corporate culture?



# To stimulate change in your professional environment :

Question the organizational culture and socialization mechanisms which are specific to the environment

- ▶ What can be done to shift from managing minorities to changing the institution?
- ▶ How to make the implicit explicit (unwritten rules and invisible norms) ?
- ▶ Promote OPENESS. Every person counts.



# Towards an inclusive institution :

Tools for action about diversity

- **A diagnostic - Figures, statistics, hard metrics** : starting with an inventory/diagnostic to take a snapshot of the situation in terms of well-being at work, integration of disability, diversity management in teams, and relations with students and doctoral students. This could imply for instance launching large-scale satisfaction surveys (as universities do for the evaluation of teaching).
- **Values** : institutions need to be clear and vocal on what they stand for, which is primarily a question of their values. Values not only proclaimed but discussed and practised. See [https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/core\\_values\\_work\\_brage\\_lovkrona.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/core_values_work_brage_lovkrona.pdf)
- **Examples:** Cascade measure, blind CVs, quotas, role models, (interview of a researcher from a minority /discriminated category ), mentoring , ...

# Towards an inclusive institution :

Tools for action about diversity

The "well-being in the workplace" angle allows the issue to be addressed as broadly as possible :time management, work-life balance, problems of sexual and moral harassment, logic of marginalisation within teams, ....

The recruitment procedures might need some reviewing and more information and transparency.

# Resources

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- <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>
- <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/researchers/intercultural-assistant>



**The mind is like  
a parachute,  
it works best  
when it is open**

**Dalai Lama**