

# INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: 5 GOLDEN RULES

## MODELS OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

**ERMES**

LLP-LdV-TOI-11-IT-592  
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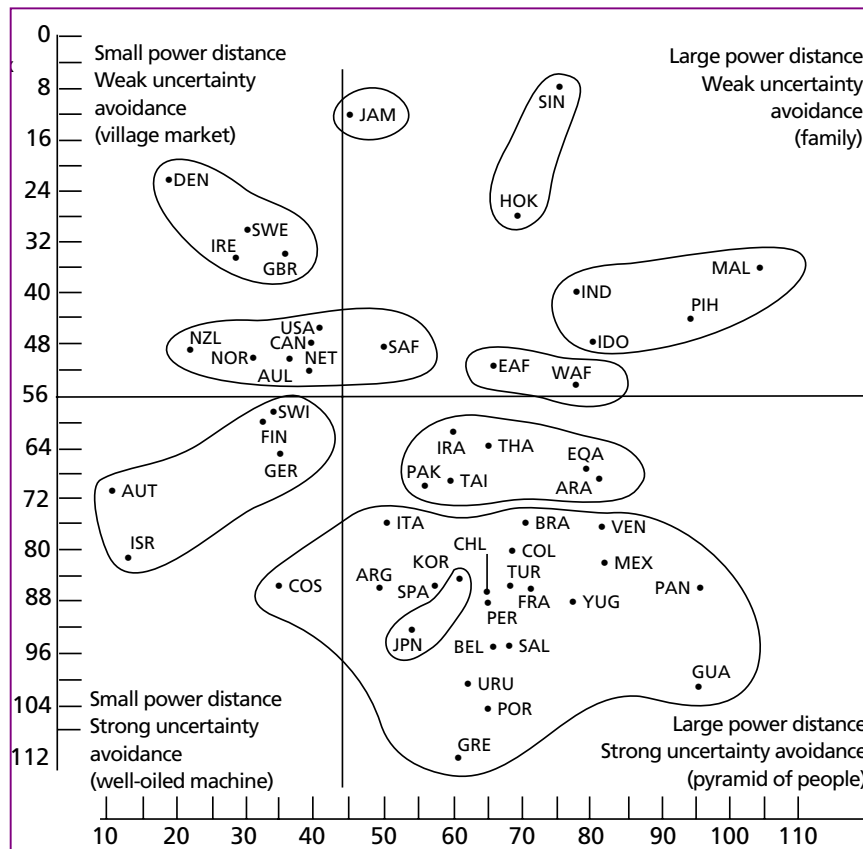
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## Models of cultural dimensions

### Geert Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions



From: Hofstede, Geert (1991) Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind

The modern understanding of general cultural value parameters that can be used for describing any world culture and gain insight into their way of collaboration, leadership and everyday behaviour, are almost entirely based on the works of Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner. An overview of these will give us a good basis for a framework with which to enter a new culture and organise the new information.

Geert Hofstede's "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" describes 5 dimensions of culture include 5 ways of describing cultural values and ways in which the lives in a particular culture are determined: power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI) and long-term orientation (LTO).

## Power distance

The dimension of power distance refers to the degree of inequality that exists and is accepted in the culture. In any culture people naturally have different levels of power. The PDI index describes the degree to which these differences are accepted and even embraced, particularly as defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. In a culture with a high PD score, people understand "their place" in the system and appreciate hierarchy as a way of keeping things ordered and clear. In cultures with a lower PD score the power is shared and people are seen as essentially equal, with hierarchic structures set up only for organisational convenience.

Low PDI	High PDI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low dependence needs</li> <li>- Inequality minimised</li> <li>- Hierarchy for convenience</li> <li>- Superiors accessible</li> <li>- All should have equal rights</li> <li>- Change by evolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High dependence</li> <li>- Inequality accepted</li> <li>- Hierarchy needed</li> <li>- Superiors often inaccessible</li> <li>- Power holders have privileges</li> <li>- Change by revolution</li> </ul>
Austria, Denmark, Ireland	India, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mexico

Table from: Culture GPS by ITIM International at [www.cultureGPS.com](http://www.cultureGPS.com)

## Individualism

Individualism (IDV) score refers to the strength of communities and the ties between people. A high IDV score indicates a society where personal opinions are valued, responsibility is individual ("I" am responsible rather than the team), and the persons are tied only to their immediate family. All other groups are loose and one can choose how much to commit oneself.

A collective society with a low IDV score would have strong group cohesion, loyalty and respect between members of the group – everyone is responsible for the well being of everyone else in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Apart from this, the groups would have a more important role in the society and the groups a person belongs to (school, work, family, relatives) are not easily modifiable – a person can't just choose to move and start over, he is an integral part of the groups he belongs

to. This trait is also strongly connected to the issue of “losing face”. In communicating to a person from a highly collective culture, open confrontations, accusations and arguments are to be avoided due to the danger of making the other person lose face: shame him in front of his group. This is very important because one cannot escape his past failures just as he cannot escape his community. A Chinese person is not likely to make rash decisions or confront his peers because he doesn’t have a choice to start again tomorrow: anything he does is directly attached to his good name and influences the rest of his life.

Low IDV	High IDV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We” consciousness</li> <li>- Relationships have priority over tasks</li> <li>- Fulfil obligations to family, in-group, society</li> <li>- Penalty implies loss of “face” and shame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I” consciousness</li> <li>- Private opinions</li> <li>- Fulfil obligations to self</li> <li>- Penalty implies loss of self-respect and guilt</li> </ul>
China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea	America, UK, Italy

Table from: Culture GPS by ITIM International at [www.cultureGPS.com](http://www.cultureGPS.com)

## Masculinity

Masculinity (MAS) vs Femininity dimension refers to the importance of traditional male and female roles and their influence to other areas of everyday life. In cultures with high MAS scores men are expected to be strong, provide for the women and work on manly tasks. Women’s jobs are different from those of the men and the rules for their behaviour are followed rigidly.

In low MAS cultures, women do not replace the men, but women can do anything a man can do and strong assertive women are respected and accepted. At the same time, men can choose to be sensitive and work on jobs that would be seen as feminine in high masculinity cultures.

The MAS score doesn’t refer only to gender roles. It also defines whether there is sympathy for the underdog rather than admiration for the high achiever; whether successful performance or including the less fortunate is the objective; and whether asserting one’s own opinion or group consensus is more important.

The IBM studies revealed that (a) women's values differ less among societies than men's values; (b) men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from

women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine'. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values. (Hofstede 2004)

Low MAS	High MAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of life, serving others</li> <li>- Striving for consensus</li> <li>- Work in order to live</li> <li>- Small and slow are beautiful</li> <li>- Sympathy for the unfortunate</li> <li>- Intuition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Performance ambition, a need to excel</li> <li>- Tendency to polarise</li> <li>- Live in order to work</li> <li>- Big and fast are beautiful</li> <li>- Admiration for the successful achiever</li> <li>- Decisiveness</li> </ul>
Sweden, Netherlands	Japan

Table from: Culture GPS by ITIM International at [www.cultureGPS.com](http://www.cultureGPS.com)

## Uncertainty avoidance

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) describes the degree of anxiety people feel when in uncertain or unknown situations. High UAI-scoring cultures try to avoid ambiguous situations whenever possible and have a set of rules and laws in place to know what do, should anything out of the ordinary come about. There is such a thing as a collective "truth" and people are expected to agree with the generally acknowledged truths. This applies also on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth; 'there can only be one Truth and we have it'.

Low UAI scores indicate that the society welcomes new events and values differences of behaviour and opinion. There aren't many rules, as flexibility is expected from people in reacting to each unique situation. Each person is encouraged to discover their own truth.

Low UAI	High UAI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relaxed, less stress</li> <li>- Hard work is not a virtue per se</li> <li>- Emotions not shown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anxiety, greater stress</li> <li>- Inner urge to work hard</li> <li>- Showing of emotions accepted</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict and competition seen as fair play</li> <li>- Acceptance of dissent</li> <li>- Flexibility</li> <li>- Less need for rules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict is threatening</li> <li>- Need for agreement</li> <li>- Need to avoid failure</li> <li>- Need for laws and rules</li> </ul>
Denmark, Bhutan	Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Russia

Table from: Culture GPS by ITIM International at [www.cultureGPS.com](http://www.cultureGPS.com)

## Long-term orientation

The Long Term Orientation (LTO) Index refers to how much society values long-standing traditions and gains as opposed to immediate or short-term results. High LTO indexes are particularly characteristic of Asian countries with a strong background of Confucian philosophy. Long Term Orientation values perseverance and thrift, whereas Short Term Orientation cultures value respecting traditions, working on social relations and avoiding “loss of face”. Cultures with low LTO index are more likely to adhere to one certain and proven way of seeing things and strive for immediate stability and results. High LTO cultures know that if the results are not achieved tomorrow, it doesn’t really matter very much, because one never knows what happens in the future.

Low LTO	High LTO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absolute truth</li> <li>- Conventional / traditional</li> <li>- Concern for stability</li> <li>- Quick results expected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many truths</li> <li>- Pragmatic</li> <li>- Acceptance of change</li> <li>- Perseverance</li> </ul>
America, UK, Sweden	China, Taiwan, Vietnam

Table from: Culture GPS by ITIM International at [www.cultureGPS.com](http://www.cultureGPS.com)

Hofstede’s model of cultural dimensions is quite similar to that of Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner’s model, described in “Riding on the Waves of Culture”, though not all the described dimensions are identical: their model of culture is based on seven dimensions. There are five scales that describe the communication between the members of the given culture, one that defines the concept of time and one that defines the role that fate has in our lives:

1. Universalism vs. particularism (Should rules be the same for everyone? Should relationships influence the communication or are rules more important? – see also Hofstede’s Uncertainty avoidance)

2. Individualism vs. collectivism (Is independent thought valued? Do we make decisions as a group or as individuals?)
3. Neutral vs. emotional (Is it acceptable to display our emotions?)
4. Specific vs. diffuse (Is responsibility individual or collective? – see also Hofstede's Individualism)
5. Achievement vs. ascription (Is our status assigned to us as given or should we prove being worthy of our position? – see similarities with Hofstede's Power Distance)
6. Sequential vs. synchronic (Do we do one thing at a time or several at once?)
7. Internal vs. external control (Fatalism: do we control our lives / environment or are we controlled by it?) (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998)

Other important parameters are those presented by Edward T. Hall ("Beyond Culture", 1976):

- high / low context
- monochronic / polychronic cultures
- need for personal space: high / low territoriality

## High/Low context

The high/low context indicator is particularly important for intercultural communication. A low-context person, say, a German or American, might remain blissfully ignorant of everything that has been said and decided at an English meeting. The English way of communication, but even more so that of many Asian countries, is high-context – this means that most of the information that is conveyed in a message remains between the lines – it is perfectly clear to everyone that has a very good knowledge of the background of the message and the unwritten rules of the local culture, but much less so to everyone else. Much of the information that would be included in the message in a low-context culture is taken for granted – it is not included "because it is obvious".

For example, written contracts would be much shorter in high-context cultures as all the necessary information is included in the culture; low-context cultures would feel the need to spell out various aspects of the issues at hand in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

## Monochronic / Polychronic time concept



This cultural indicator describes the way in which people believe the things should be done. Monochronic cultures like agendas, planning, scheduling and concentrating on their task in order to follow it through from beginning to end before moving along to another one. This is very familiar to anyone in the Western world, especially in connection with the concepts of time management. Most monochronic cultures are also low context, preferring things to be spelled out in order to avoid misunderstanding.

Polychronic cultures do the things in their own time – it means that each task will eventually be completed, if not now, then later. If something else comes up, such as a phone call or an unexpected visitor, the interaction and social interaction is given priority, because it is much more important than simply getting things over with.

### **Need for space: high/low territoriality**

Anyone with some intercultural communication experience has noticed that people's need for personal space is rather more varied than natural differences between individuals of the same culture. Edward T. Hall calls this cultural dimension proxemics – the amount of space different cultures need for efficient functioning and personal comfort. Intruding on someone's personal space is seen as an act of aggression and results in intense discomfort. It is essentially a question of territory. High territoriality refers to the attention a person gives to one's area and possessions and the amount of discomfort transgressors provoke. People from cultures with low territoriality, however, are more likely to share space and possessions without any problems. Generally low territoriality in culture goes together with high context and vice versa.

### **The Lewis Model**

Richard D. Lewis, an international authority on cultural differences, divides cultures on the scale between three groups based on their way of acting: linear-active, multi-active and reactive cultures. This is mostly related to the concept of monochronic and polychronic cultures, but expanded to other areas of life and combined with a third dimension. In this model, it is all about culture and efficiency – which type of action is most likely to yield best results? Lewis's work is largely based on Hofstede's cultural indexes as well as Trompenaars's and Hampden-Turner's and Hall's research. His basis for dividing the world cultures on three axis is the following division between linear-active, multi-active and reactive cultures.

Linear-active	Reactive	Reactive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- introvert</li> <li>- patient</li> <li>- quiet</li> <li>- minds own business</li> <li>- likes privacy</li> <li>- plans ahead methodically</li> <li>- does one thing at a time</li> <li>- works fixed hours</li> <li>- punctual</li> <li>- dominated by timetables and schedules</li> <li>- compartmentalises projects</li> <li>- sticks to plans</li> <li>- sticks to facts</li> <li>- gets information from statistics, reference books, databases</li> <li>- job-oriented</li> <li>- unemotional</li> <li>- works with department</li> <li>- follows correct procedures</li> <li>- accepts favours reluctantly</li> <li>- delegates to competent colleagues</li> <li>- completes action chains</li> <li>- likes fixed agendas</li> <li>- brief on telephone</li> <li>- uses memoranda</li> <li>- respects officialdom</li> <li>- dislikes losing face</li> <li>- confronts with logic</li> <li>- limited body language</li> <li>- rarely interrupts</li> <li>- separates social / professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- extrovert</li> <li>- impatient</li> <li>- talkative</li> <li>- inquisitive</li> <li>- gregarious</li> <li>- plans grand outline only</li> <li>- does several things at once</li> <li>- works any hours</li> <li>- unpunctual</li> <li>- timetable unpredictable</li> <li>- lets one project influence another</li> <li>- changes plans</li> <li>- juggles facts</li> <li>- gets first-hand (oral) information</li> <li>- people-oriented</li> <li>- emotional</li> <li>- gets round all departments</li> <li>- pulls strings</li> <li>- seeks favours</li> <li>- delegates to relations</li> <li>- completes human transactions</li> <li>- interrelates everything</li> <li>- talks for hours</li> <li>- rarely writes memos</li> <li>- seeks out (top) key person</li> <li>- has ready excuses</li> <li>- confronts emotionally</li> <li>- unrestricted body language</li> <li>- interrupts frequently</li> <li>- interweaves social / professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- introvert</li> <li>- patient</li> <li>- silent</li> <li>- respectful</li> <li>- good listener</li> <li>- looks at general principles</li> <li>- reacts</li> <li>- flexible hours</li> <li>- punctual</li> <li>- reacts to partners' timetable</li> <li>- sees whole picture</li> <li>- makes slight changes</li> <li>- statements are promises</li> <li>- uses both types of information</li> <li>- people-oriented</li> <li>- quietly caring</li> <li>- all departments</li> <li>- inscrutable, calm</li> <li>- protects face of other</li> <li>- delegates to reliable people</li> <li>- reacts to partner</li> <li>- thoughtful</li> <li>- summarises well</li> <li>- plans slowly</li> <li>- ultra honest</li> <li>- must not lose face</li> <li>- avoids confrontation</li> <li>- subtle body language</li> <li>- doesn't interrupt</li> <li>- connects social and professional</li> </ul>

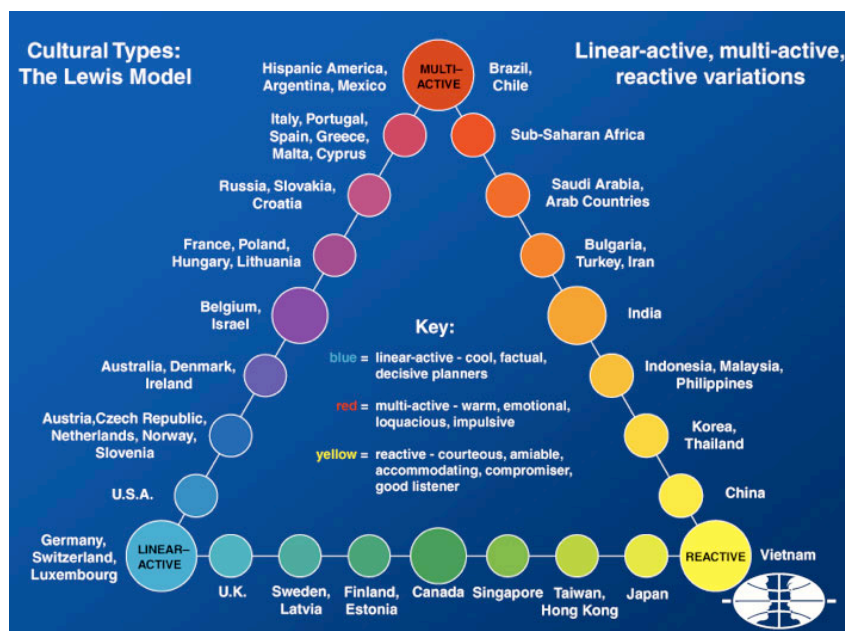
Linear-active, Multi-active and Reactive scale – Richard D. Lewis "When Cultures Collide"

Linear-active cultures like planning and organising their tasks and deal with one issue at a time. Disturbances that cause them to switch to another task are seen as distractions that should be avoided as much as possible. Examples of this type of cultures would be Germany and America. The reliable information sources are factual, official and written sources rather than hearsay and gossip.

Multi-active cultures are more than happy to dedicate their attention to several things at once and to change focus when something more interesting comes up. This task-juggling proves to be efficient for them as they eventually manage to complete many things in a short amount of time (though not necessarily the one they set out to complete in the first place – it will be done in due course though). The Latin cultures are a good example of this. These people are also commonly loquacious, vivacious and like to change their course of action according to what

seems more attractive at the time. They like to gather their information from dialogues with their contacts.

Reactive cultures include many of the Eastern collective-oriented harmony-seeking cultures, but also Finland. They prefer to listen and see what their interlocutor decides to do before taking action themselves. Politeness and courtesy is their paramount concern and accommodating the other's needs in order to establish strong relationships is the basis of every business venture.



The Lewis Model - <http://www.crossculture.com/services/cross-culture/>

The Lewis Model places each world culture in a position on one of the axis between reactive, multi-active and linear-active cultures. The model is flexible and accommodates regional complexities well as it allows for degrees of differences on each scale. Some allowances need to be made when considering this division the described culture is always the majority mainstream culture and obviously cannot include all minorities and subcultures present in each cultural space. It does, however, give us a good overview of what another culture is likely to value and how to communicate with them.

## ***Building the cultural profile***

Now, knowing all this – the historical background, relations with neighbours, religion and the cultural parameters of our target culture, chances are we will be facing the intercultural encounter much as an over-exerted student facing an exam. So much to remember! So many taboos! And we are undoubtedly likely to end up with a gaffe or two. The upside is that having more information undoubtedly facilitates gathering more information and structuring what we

already know. Our new experiences are not going to be isolated bewildering episodes from which we can't even start to make sense, but conscious experiments and reliable results. We can see for ourselves if the stereotypes are true and if Hofstede's dimensions make any sense in the real world. The final decisions are up to ourselves, so naturally all the collected information should be put to the test out on the field.