## The Culture Spectrum: Intro to Behavior in the Workplace

Cross-cultural workplaces can be confusing. But they don’t need to be!

The simple model below highlights eight pairs of contrasting behaviors, helping you navigate any global workplace. Think of each pair as forming a spectrum. People and cultures can sit anywhere between the two types. Analyze your colleagues and yourself to identify gaps, similarities and ways to work more effectively. Dive in!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Productivity</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct</strong></td>
<td><strong>Indirect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity and efficiency are top priorities</td>
<td>Non-verbal cues are important, conflict is avoided</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Expressive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reserved</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays of enthusiasm are common, casual communication is normal</td>
<td>Emotional self-control is respected, personal and professional selves are separate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individualistic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group-oriented</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal progress, individual identity and achievement are key</td>
<td>Identity is formed in relation to groups, communities and teams</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Egalitarian</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hierarchical</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although hierarchies exist, an atmosphere of inclusivity and equality is nurtured</td>
<td>Status and hierarchy are respected and observed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Task-based</strong></td>
<td><strong>Relationship-based</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals and outcomes are the focus, relationships are secondary</td>
<td>Personal connections often take priority over productivity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monochronic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Polychronic</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time is limited, schedules must be followed and punctuality is expected</td>
<td>Relationships are prioritized over schedules, multitasking is normal, punctuality isn’t essential</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Risk-tolerance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Certainty</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation is valued, risk is seen as a positive, ambiguity is expected and flexibility is required</td>
<td>Stability is valued, rules and procedures are followed, traditions are honored</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-spiritual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spiritual</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work and spiritual beliefs are separate, religion isn’t discussed in the workplace</td>
<td>Religion is central to day-to-day life, normal to display religiosity in the workplace</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sample Questions to Ask When Analyzing Behavior in the Workplace

Make use of these questions to help you uncover behavioral patterns in others, or yourself. Use them before going abroad to practice applying these behavior scales and return to them regularly when abroad to hone your insights on how your colleagues communicate, build relationships, manage work, and articulate deeply held beliefs in the workplace.

### Direct vs. Indirect

- Do managers give clear and concise instructions?
- Is it normal to get both positive and negative feedback? Or do managers avoid direct criticism?
- Are decisions made quickly, or is decision making seen as a process that takes time and requires lots of background explanations, and feeling out the position of others?
- Do you notice a lot of non-verbal cues and body language being used in workplace meetings?
- Do you ever leave a meeting unsure of your exact goals?

### Expressive vs. Reserved

- Are your coworkers and managers enthusiastic and expressive in the workplace?
- Is it normal to see displays of emotion in the office?
- Is rule-based politeness (e.g. formal greetings, introductions, meetings) an important part of workplace communication?
- Do people generally speak loudly with lots of gestures, or more quietly and calmly?

### Individualistic vs. Group-oriented

- Are successes celebrated as a team?
- Are individuals singled out and highlighted as high achievers?
- Is competition encouraged between employees?
- Are individuals recognized for original thinking, independent thought and uniqueness?
- Are employees more valued when they support the team, build partnerships and work collaboratively?
- Is workwear expressive and individualistic or highly uniform?

### Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical

- Does the office manager encourage feedback from entry-level workers?
- Do entry-level workers ever have casual interactions with senior management, or would that be considered inappropriate?
- Are you expected to address managers with an official title or honorific?
- Is your work self-directed, or must you work through a chain of command?
- How important is it to follow rules and procedures to achieve work objectives?
- Is it possible for a worker to move up the office ranks based on work quality or can advancement also be based upon maintaining good relationships?
**Task-based vs. Relationship-based**

- Do managers reward quick action and productivity, or do they promote long-term loyalty as an approach to organizational success?
- Is nepotism and the existence of a so-called "old boys" network considered normal, or is it frowned upon?
- Are “social” interruptions considered a normal part of the workday?
- Do managers engage in long business lunches with potential clients?
- Is your success highly tied to your professional output, or to your relationship-building abilities in the workplace?
- Is there a tolerance for failure and risk taking?

**Monochronic vs. Polychronic**

- Are deadlines, timelines and schedules an integral part of every project and workday?
- Would it be considered impolite to be late for a scheduled meeting?
- Are interruptions treated as a negative thing, or are they accepted as normal?
- Is your work schedule highly defined? Or is it more free flowing, with room for change on a day-to-day basis?
- Is multitasking the preferred way of working, or do managers prefer you to focus on a single task until it’s completed?

**Risk tolerance vs. Certainty**

- Do managers encourage you to “think outside the box”? Do they welcome fresh ideas from all levels of worker?
- Do managers often talk about progress and innovation, or do they favor stability and certainty?
- Are there many rules and regulations in place for how work is to be carried out?
- Does failure inhibit career advancement, or is it considered an acceptable risk?

**Non-spiritual vs. Spiritual**

- Do managers and colleagues keep their spiritual beliefs to themselves?
- Have you heard or seen references to religion in the office workspace?
- Does anyone in the office ever engage in prayer in the workplace?
- Do co-workers ever make religious references during meetings or as part of everyday greetings?
- Are there more or less religious holidays in comparison to your home country?
Want to discover more about the Culture Spectrum?

Read this companion Quick Guide which provide greater detail on each of the eight behavior scales:

**The Culture Spectrum in Action: Adapting to Behavior in the Workplace**
(15 pgs)

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**A Last Word**

It’s easy to assume that your own approach to work is universal or “correct”.

But as you move through the world, you’ll soon discover there are countless alternative approaches to achieving success in the workplace.

When entering a cross-cultural workspace, keep an analytical and open mind. Use the Culture Spectrum model to help you navigate and thrive in your new environment.

*Good luck!*