

PAULE WENDELBERGER COACHING



INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION

# Intercultural Communication — Overview

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## Target group

Those who attend this seminar are being sent abroad to deal with foreign co-workers and business partners, or they are working in international teams in Germany or elsewhere.

## Goals

The aim of the seminar is to identify cultural differences. The participants will understand how cultures affect the process of doing business and managing. It is critical to understand that different cultures evoke different perceptions. It will be emphasized that there are many ways of managing and organizing. The participants will be given a better understanding of their own culture and cultural differences in general, by learning how to recognize and cope with these differences in a business context.

**Duration** 2–3 days

**Language** English

**Handout** Optional

- Topics**
- Why intercultural training?
  - What is the real meaning of culture?
  - Why is intercultural communication different from the in the normal workplace?
  - Differences between individual and group cultures
  - Uncertainty avoidance
  - Time factor
  - Perception
  - Why specific cultures have difficulties with diffuse ones
  - Emotional and neutral societies
  - Is there a “best way”?

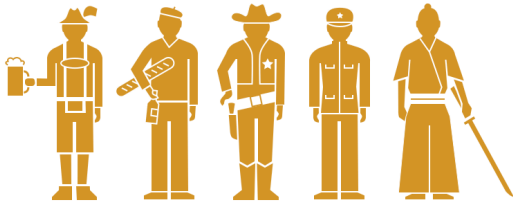
# Intercultural awareness

## Intercultural perplexities

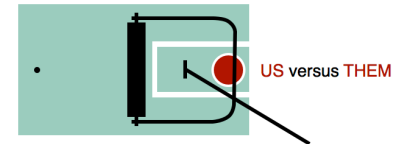
A recent study on why international joint ventures often failed showed only 30% of failures were attributed to problems of planning, technology, finance etc. — a full 70% were directly linked to the behavior patterns of those in management positions who had difficulties with their new cultural encounters.

## Stereotypes — *Us versus Them?*

Stereotypes might be helpful in certain circumstances. But they do not tell us anything about one particular person. Besides, stereotypes can be very damaging —



when communication breaks down and we start to build up barriers. If we interpret foreign behavior in terms of our own culture we are trapped in the so called *intercultural mousetrap* — we are here and *they* are there, *us versus them*.



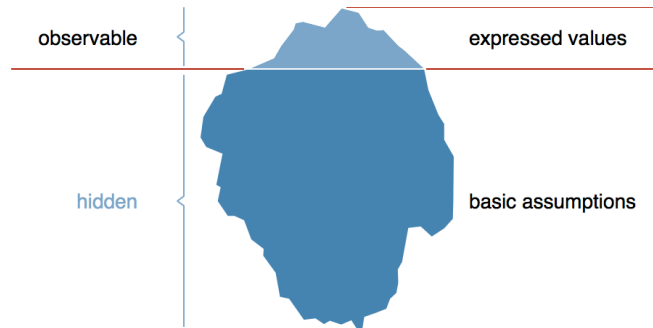
## There are many roads to Rome...

If we find ourselves in difficult situations like this, we should remember the old saying that there are many roads to Rome — that there might be other ways of handling things, and other ways of solving problems. But what are these ways? If we ask ourselves this question, we are already moving in the right direction — becoming *interculturally aware*.

# What is culture?

## Expressed values and basic assumptions

Culture can be seen as a way of life of a group of people, as an integrated system of learned patterns of behavior. Culture manifests itself in a system of values. Some of those values are observable (i.e. art, literature, cooking, dress etc.). Others stay hidden (i.e. perception of time, handling emotions, gender rules, concept of beauty etc.).



Imagine an iceberg. We can see only a small part. But most of the iceberg stays underneath the surface, invisible for us. That goes for cultural values as well. Most of them do not meet the eye.

## Types of cultures

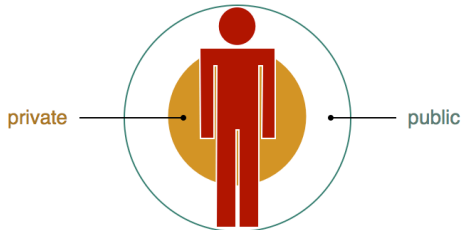
To understand the differences between cultures we have to isolate a few elements that are dealt with differently in different cultures. The Dutch sociologist Geert Hofstede suggests five categories: *dealing with equality and inequality within groups, uncertainty avoidance, the relationship of individuals and groups, gender rules and the perception of time.*



# Specific and diffuse

## Private and public zone

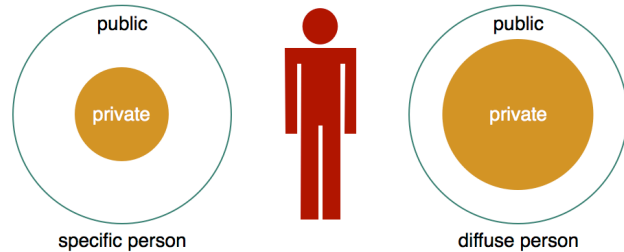
We can differentiate between specific and diffuse cultures. This can be crucial to understand different communication styles and behaviors. People have a private and a public zone. Both of which embody different behavioral characteristics. Moreover, these zones differ significantly in different cultures.



## Specific and diffuse types

Americans for example, have a relatively large public zone. They are seen as friendly and communicative.

Relationships with acquaintances take place in their public zone and are rather loose. We call this the *specific type*.



Diffuse types have a relatively large private zone and a relatively small public zone. These people will not get friendly easily, for friendship takes place in their private zone. They have less but more intense contacts, usually appreciate strong family ties and are seen by specific types as distant and reserved.

# Specific and diffuse

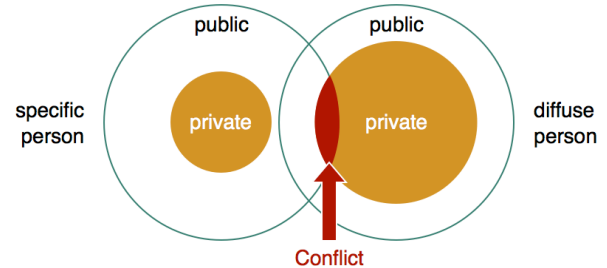
## Danger zone

If a specific type meets another specific type this contact will take place in their public zones. If a specific type meets a diffuse type many irritations and misunderstandings can occur. The specific type might easily penetrate the diffuse person's private zone and cause resentment — without even knowing it.



Overlapping the specific person's public space with the diffuse person's private space should not be

underestimated. It is a *danger zone* that causes many (if not the most) intercultural mishaps.

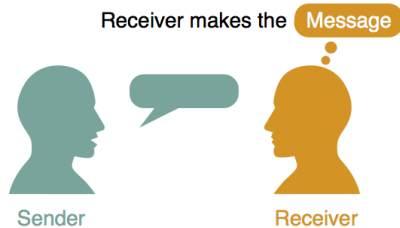


# The “best way”

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## Receiver makes the message

Communication works on different levels: spoken word, the way we say something (our voice with the entire range of modulations and intonations) and body language. It may come as a surprise that our choice of words is far less important than the use of voice and body language. It is not enough to speak the other’s language. We have to learn how the other person perceives us.



Intercultural communication is above all *communication*. This means, what applies to our daily exchange of

information within our own culture, also applies to a great extent when exchanging information between members of different cultures. We don’t communicate with cultures, we communicate with *people*; and it does not matter at all what we are trying to convey. What counts is what our counterpart understands. The *receiver* makes the message.

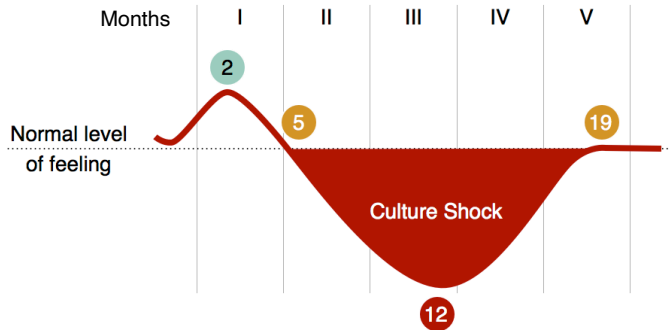
Talking about a particular specific subject matter might quickly make a diffuse type feel personally attacked. Fear to losing face is the worst one can evoke. Typical specific statements, such as “Please don’t take this personally,” are not helpful at all in such situations.



## Living with diversity

In spite of this, what is the best way of handling these differences? How can we effectively prepare for intercultural encounters or for living and working in an

# The “best way”

international environment? The first and most important rule is: Learn to understand yourself and your own culture. Understanding one’s own environment is the best premise of understanding others.



-  Adaptability
-  Nonjudgemental
-  Sense of humor
-  Acceptance of failure
-  Lower goal orientation

differences as perfectly normal and we can live with them easily. That is after all what is most important.

The famous Swiss psychologist Carl Jung said:  
“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” If we understand ourselves and the others we are able to recognize



## About the seminar

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When we send someone abroad to deal with foreign colleagues or clients, they should be carefully selected for their suitability. Firstly, for their own comfort and to insure their effectiveness, they should be taught to speak and read the language of the country, and thoroughly informed about the culture. Formal training in language, history, government, and customs is only the first step. Of equal importance is an introduction to the nonverbal language of the country.

This seminar is about cultural differences and how they affect the process of doing business and managing. We will attempt to do two things: dispel the notion that there is one best way of managing and organizing; give you a better understanding of your own culture and cultural differences in general, by learning how to recognize and cope with these in a business context. It is essential that we understand how other people read our behavior — not our words, but our *behavior*. If this seminar does

nothing more than plant this idea, it will have served its purpose. However, we have more ambitious goals.

Here are a few questions you might ask:

- Can a three-day cross-cultural training seminar bring about changes among the participants?
- Why intercultural training?
- What is the real meaning of culture?
- Why is intercultural communication different from that in the normal workplace?

All of these questions will be addressed and answered in detail throughout the seminar.

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