

Working Effectively Across Cultures

A Practical Toolkit for Global Collaboration In Celebration of World Day for Cultural Diversity

21 May 2025

INTRODUCTION



**United
Nations**

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue
and Development, 21 May

The **World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development**, celebrated each year on 21 May, is a timely reminder of the richness and value that different cultural perspectives bring. More than ever, businesses need people who can collaborate effectively across cultures – navigating different values, communication styles and expectations with agility and respect.

This resource shares practical collaboration strategies rooted in cultural awareness. Whether you're working in a multicultural team, managing international partnerships, or expanding into new markets, these tips can help you foster stronger, more inclusive and more effective working relationships.



Let's move beyond
cultural difference and
towards cultural dialogue.

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COLLABORATION STRATEGIES

The strategies provided overleaf are based on the works of the best known experts in cross-cultural studies - Edward T Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Erin Meyer. The following is a brief description of each cultural parameter described.

🗣️ Edward T Hall → High vs. Low Context

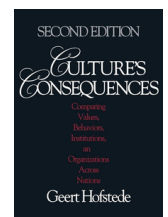
High context communicators suppose that the people they are talking to are wise to the context in which the message is set: my listeners have a good idea what this is all about, and if they don't know they can guess. So, in high context cultures ideas are not spelled out in detail. People depend on each other to piece together the whole message within the context they both understand, and try not to bore each other with step-by-step explanations. Communication depends to a great extent on facial expressions, body language, inflexions of the voice and eye contact.



Low context communicators like to spell things out, and to have things spelt out to them. Sentences are completed. Only one person speaks at a time. Telephone agreements are confirmed by e-mail.

🏛️ Geert Hofstede → Power Distance

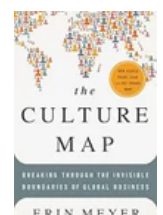
Hofstede's book "Culture's Consequences" is based on a large scale, rigorous survey of IBM subsidiaries. Each national culture scores high to low along four dimensions and we have used Power Distance in this toolkit.



In **high power-distance** cultures the boss is the boss; everyone is in their place; employees are may not criticise....while by the **low power-distance** code - superiors and subordinates are colleagues; those in power try to look less powerful than they are; employees expect to be consulted.

🌍 Erin Meyer → Task vs Relationship

In her book "The Culture Map", Meyer describes **task-based** cultures as cultures that value efficiency, direct communication, and a focus on achieving goals. By contrast, **relationship-based** cultures prioritise building trust and rapport before engaging in business. They may involve more personal interactions, like sharing meals or discussing personal matters.



These frameworks offer practical ways to decode cultural behaviours that influence trust, leadership, and collaboration at work.

COLLABORATION STRATEGIES

Below are strategies for adjusting how you act in the workplace to work more effectively with people from other backgrounds. Use these strategies to help you understand how you can collaborate effectively with others.

Communication Style	
<p>Indirect cultures include Japan, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India (varies by region), UAE, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ghana, Brazil</p> <p>If you deal with people who are more indirect (value harmony and face) in their communication than you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pay extra attention to the way you phrase your requests or statements - directness may be interpreted as being abrupt or even rude • try to watch and decipher the meaning of the nonverbal communication (body language, pauses, intonation); the speaker's message is partly sent in this way • choose a private, not a public, moment when you need to disagree or criticise • deliver your message partly by hints and suggestions, not by final-sounding statements • find an indirect way to communicate disagreement (e.g. "Shall we look at this later?" instead of "We could never agree to this") but check for reactions in body language and tone • leave room for interpretation in what you are saying, and expect to interpret what is said to you • use private meetings to get extra information • do not deliver uncomfortable facts openly 	<p>Direct cultures include: US, Canada, Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Russia</p> <p>If you deal with people who are more direct (value clarity and efficiency) in their communication than you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pay extra attention to hard information you are delivering and less to phrasing and style - hard information is what your audience is listening for • do not always wait for a private moment when you need to disagree or criticise • make very clear proposals - hints and suggestions may be missed • find a direct way to communicate disagreement ("I'm sorry but we don't agree" will be more effective than "Shall we look at this later?" unless you really plan to resolve it later) • do not leave much room for interpretation in what you are saying - vague, open statements may be considered confusing and unhelpful • rely more on public meetings to get key information • do not bury uncomfortable facts - honesty will be appreciated more than diplomacy

Attitudes to Authority	
<p>High power distance cultures include Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Singapore, UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, Nigeria, Ghana, Russia, Ukraine, Romania</p> <p>If you are dealing with people who tolerate greater power distance (the boss is the boss) than you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show respect for people with higher status • make sure that you understand the chain of authority and its implication • accept that employees may like strong supervision and feel comfortable with a directive, persuasive supervisor • do not put employees in a position where they have to disagree with their managers 	<p>Low power distance cultures include Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Israel</p> <p>If you are dealing with people who tolerate less power distance (superiors and subordinates are colleagues) than you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make sure your staff feel empowered, if you want to get the best performance out of them • avoid close supervision - it is likely to be counterproductive and seen as offensive • focus on encouraging or inspiring your staff, not controlling or instructing them

Attitudes to Authority

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> do not expect your being available to build your authority - your staff will respect you even if you are distant do not try to mix informally with your superiors unless the idea comes from them actively encourage your staff to take the initiative, if you do not want them to follow your lead closely consult your superiors before taking the initiative yourself be ready to give direct orders to get things done | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make yourself available to your staff more often and share some informal occasions with them do not always wait for orders or authority to act - others may be waiting for you to take the initiative do not expect automatic respect and obedience find out how much authority you have - and exercise it fully |
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Collaboration & Trust

Relationship-orientated cultures include China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kenya, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal

If you deal with people who are **more relationship-orientated** (value trust and relationships) than you are

- make relationship building one of your key tasks
- give time getting to know your partners
- do not wait to get to know them beforehand
- don't let deadlines and other pressures endanger the relationship
- remember that your partners may judge a project to be a success if your relationship is strengthened at the end, even if some deadlines and milestones were missed
- allow time for small talk give away some personal information - even if it does not seem relevant to your work
- when discussing business, remember that your partner is paying attention to the kind of person you seem to be - not just to the subject you are discussing

Task-orientated cultures include US, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Israel

If you deal with people who are **more task-orientated** (value goals and outcomes) than you are

- try to use the practical work as a way of getting to know your partners
- be ready to make agreements before you are fully familiar with the partners
- remember that achievement of your joint objectives may be the best way to build relationships
- your partners may not calculate time for socialising into the plans
- remember that your partner may believe that not discussing personal matters shows greater respect
- to find out more about your partner, you will have to sensitively and actively ask questions
- offer objective views as well as personal opinions
- be clear about mutual advantage in the partnership - it will be the whole basis of the relationship in the mind of your partner

OUR OFFERING

For three decades, Babel has supported global organisations in building the skills, confidence and cultural understanding needed to thrive in an interconnected world. We've seen first-hand how cultural diversity – when met with curiosity, empathy and skill – can become a powerful asset in international business.

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- Persuasion and Influence
- The International Profiler
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- World-Class Customer Service

Interested in equipping your teams with the skills to collaborate more effectively across cultures? Please contact me on:

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