



Cultural differences – general questions

It is sometimes hard to understand how people behave and reason in a new country. People in the world often have the same goals, but how we believe we best reach them may differ. There is not one way which is the best. We are just used to our way of doing things and will get confused when others do it differently. To be successful at the work place you must try cope with the differences and adapt to the company culture. Accept the differences!

Here is a tool to be aware of differences in 5 main areas: Power, Relations, Time, Emotions and Information. Pose the questions to yourself and you'll easily find out about your own values and how they may differ from the company/country culture.

1. Power

- How we rank ourselves according to wealth, power and influence.
- How we look upon equality.

At the work place:

- Does the manager have a big fancy office?
- Must the manager be dressed properly?
- Do you have to address him/her by his/her title or last name or can you call him by his nick name?
- Do you have to obey him or can you question or contradict him/her?
- Can you come up with ideas of how to carry out your work in the best way, or do you just do as you are told?

2. Relations

- How we arrange our relations to feel comfortable and safe.
- Do you try to make friends with as many persons as possible so that you can exchange favours and help each other in different situations?
- Do you just make friends with those you know you can trust?

At the work place:

- Do people greet you welcome and ask you many questions about your life?
- Do people talk about their families and private life or do they just talk about work?
- Do people meet after work or do they just work together?
- Do people ask you for favours or don't they want to disturb and bother you?

3. Time and Efficiency

- How we relate to time and structure.
- What's efficient, to do many things at the same time or to do one thing at a time?
- What's most important, to have a chat with a friend you haven't seen for long or to be in time for a meeting with another friend?
- When is an apology accurate, after a delay of 5 – 15 - 30 minutes?

At the work place:

- How do people react when persons are late for work or at meetings?
- Do people strictly stick to working hours or do they stay until the task is accomplished?
- Do people follow action plans and hold strict to agendas, routines and work descriptions? Are people flexible and can rearrange plans easily?

4. Emotions

- How we are expected to show feelings.
- Do people show their emotions clearly to convince others how they feel?
- Do people avoid showing feelings not to embarrass other people?

At the work place:

- Are people tolerant to others who show their emotions?
- Do people interfere in conflicts or do they avoid them?
- Do people speak loudly and use a lot of body language?
- Is it difficult to understand what people really think and feel?

5. Information and communication

- How we communicate and inform others.
- Is it positive to use many words or as few as possible?
- Is it important to be direct or is that considered impolite?
- Is quietness ranked as a positive quality?

At the work place:

- Is oral or written information used most frequently?
- Are people expected to find information themselves, or is all information delivered to them?
- Do people use slang or do they express themselves in a more accurate way?
- Are people quite in the breaks?
- Do people talk a lot while carrying out the tasks?