
Applied Intercultural Communication (AICC) Worksheets

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On the following pages please find

- ➔ Agenda
- ➔ Recommended Literature
- ➔ Worksheets for exercises during the AICC sessions
- ➔ References

Please note: Worksheets are meant exclusively for internal usage in the context of the seminars in Applied Intercultural Communication under ECoVEM project.

Agenda

1. Introduction

- Content, Organizational Topics
- Culture Codes & Economics
- What is Intercultural Competence?

2. Basic Knowledge

- Definition of Culture
- Cultural Identity
- Perception and Interpretation
- How to measure culture?

3. Cultural Dimensions

- Individualism and Collectivism
- Low and High Power Distance
- Linear-active, Multi-active, Reactive
- Deal and Relationship Orientation
- Universalism and Particularism
- Language & Culture

4. Communication Styles

- Low Context and High Context
- Verbal Communication
- Non-verbal Communication

5. Business Applications

- Working in Multicultural Teams
- Meetings and Presentations
- Project Management Styles
- Intercultural Profile

Recommended Literature

Hall, Edward T. (1989): *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books.

Hofstede, Geert; Hofstede, Gert Jan; Minkov, Michael (2010): *Cultures and Organizations*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, Geert; Hofstede, Gert Jan (2002): *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories, and Synthetic Cultures*. Intercultural Press, Inc., Boston.

Inglehart, Ronald F. (2018): *Cultural Evolution*. Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, Richard D. (2010): *When Cultures Collide*. 3rd ed. Boston, Mass: Brealey.

Liu, Shuang; Volčič, Zala; Gallois, Cynthia (2014): *Introducing Intercultural Communication: Global Cultures and Contexts*. 2nd ed. Sage Publications.

Schroll-Machl, Sylvia (2011): *Doing Business with Germans. Their Perception, Our Perception*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Storti, Craig (2004): *Americans at Work: A Guide to the Can-Do People*. Intercultural Press.

Storti, Craig (2017): *Cross-Cultural Dialogues. 74 brief encounters with cultural differences*. Intercultural Press.

Thomas, David; Inkson, Kerr (2017): *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally*. 3rd ed. Berrett Koechler Publishers.

Trompenaars, Alfons; Hampden-Turner, Charles (2012): *Riding the Waves of Culture*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Trompenaars, Alfons; Hampden-Turner, Charles (2021): *Culture, Crisis and COVID-19: The Great Reset*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Meyer, Erin (2016): *Culture Map*. New York: Public Affairs. (the e-book is available at the FHWS Library) <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fhws/reader.action?docID=1634787>

The following websites on Intercultural Communication may be helpful.

However, all information should be used with care (last access: Feb 15, 2022):

<https://geerthofstede.com> Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede on culture

<http://www.internationalbusinesscenter.org> International studies, Hofstede resource pages

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xANs-xE_sdE&t=40s Cross-cultural Competence is the Basis for International Business Success. Richard Lewis' lecture at St Petersburg University

<http://www.crossculture.com/latest-news/contractual-obligations-attitudes-to-truth/>

Richard Lewis Communications' new brand for its cultural division

<https://www.kwintessential.co.uk/> Translation, Localization, Case Studies, Resource Archives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W08H4sv6rLI> Thinkers50 Interview with Erin Meyer

<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSPublicationsPresentations.jsp> World Values Survey Presentations, 2021

<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp> WVS-7 Master Questionnaire 2017-2020 English.pdf

→ **ICC-Module 1. Introduction**

How Culture Drives Behaviours | Julien S. Bourrelle, 0.0-2.03 (...it fits within the behaviours of the society that you are in); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-Yy6poJ2zs>

The speaker shares his experience of moving to another country and describes 3 ways you can relate to a culture. How does he explain them?

Confront _____

Complain _____

Conform _____

What can go wrong in intercultural situations?

Saturday Shift¹ (See explanations in CC Dialogues_KEYS)

Mr. Jones: It looks like we'll have to keep the production line running on Saturday.

Mr. Wang: I see.

Mr. Jones: Can you come in on Saturday?

Mr. Wang: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Jones: That'll be a great help.

Mr. Wang: Yes. Saturday's a special day, did you know?

Mr. Jones: How do you mean?

Mr. Wang: It's my son's birthday.

Mr. Jones: How nice. I hope you all enjoy it very much.

Mr. Wang: Thank you. I appreciate your understanding.

What are cultural assumptions of Mr. Jones (USA) and Mr. Wang (China) concerning the situation?

ICC-Module 2. Basic Knowledge about Culture. Definition of Culture

Pellegrino Riccardi: What is culture? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMyofREc5Jk>

Hofstede's definition of culture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdh40kgyYOY>
1:10-2:28

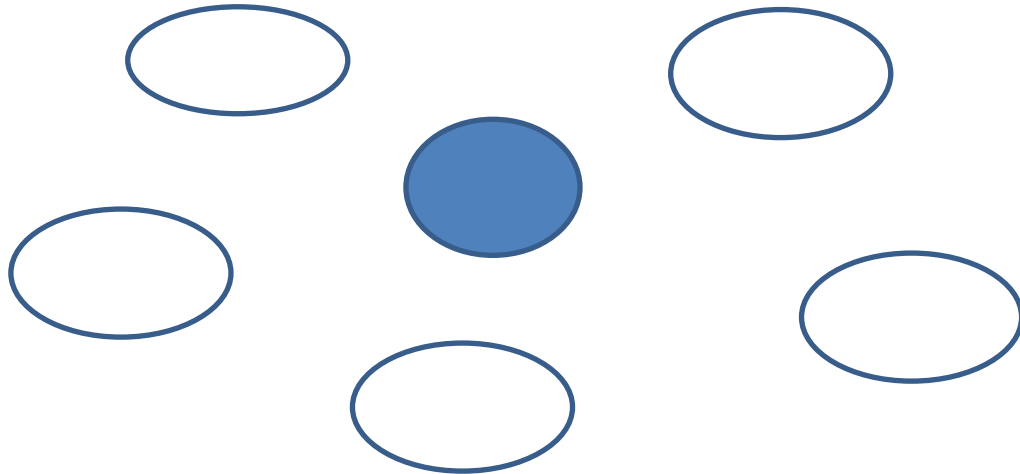
Are there other cultures besides national cultures?

¹ Storti, Craig (2017): *Cross-Cultural Dialogues: 74 brief encounters with cultural differences*, p.4-5

Me and my culture(s)¹

We are all multicultural. Each individual relates to a micro, regional, social, professional and other cultures. In fact, much of our individual personality is made up of the specific mix of cultures (or discourse communities) to which we relate. These change as we go through life. It will NOT be helpful if we try to associate a person with one, for example, national culture only.

What about you? How many cultures do YOU belong to? Fill in your own cultural profile.



The Culture Iceberg

When talking about culture, an iceberg is often used as a metaphor. Why?



A

B

¹ Adapted from https://webauthor.myemlp.de/kurse/elc/ICE-InterculturalCompetenceinEnglish/content/web/course/u153_ef904032fee1d60dff3292ec82a5bb7.html?rel=web&manifest=course& ICE – Intercultural Competence in English; last access 03.05.2022

ICC-Module 2. Cultural Identity

We are usually not aware of our own culture. What are the reasons for this lack of awareness of our own culture?

Stereotyping (negative and positive): Yafa Show

- Watch the video and write down the attributes of the American character as described by the Germans.
- Watch the video and write down the attributes of the German character as described by themselves.

Germans about themselves	Germans about Americans

Group work: Building a cultural profile, Handout 1

Goal: to motivate self-awareness of your own cultural values, norms of behaviour and cultural assumptions.

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”
Aristotle

ICC-Module 2. Perception and Interpretation

Case Study: The Boyfriend who wasn't¹

A young American man devoted a lot of attention to a Japanese woman visiting his community, including extreme courtesy – taking her arm to cross the street, and so on. The young woman later told her friends excitedly that she now had an American boyfriend. In fact, the American, who was from the Deep South of the United States where many families pride themselves on effusive courtesy, was not interested in the Japanese girl as a prospective girlfriend. He had merely tried to be polite, in a manner that came naturally to him in his own in-group.

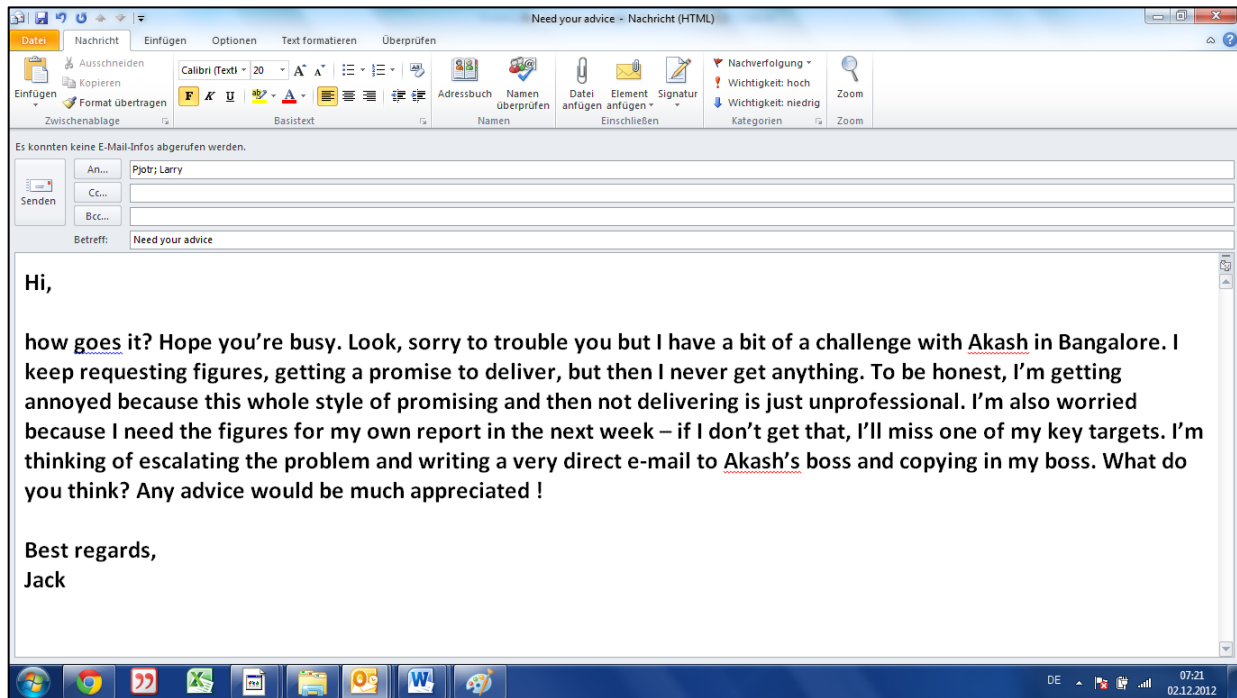
Unfortunately, the same type of behaviour practiced by a member

What behaviours are expressed here?

The ability to interpret from multiple perspectives in business, Handout 2

¹ Thomas, David C.; Inkson, Kerr (2003): *Cultural intelligence. People skills for global business*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, p. 50.

Jack is a financial controller based in New York. He has asked Akash, a colleague in India, several times over the last ten days to e-mail him some local budget figures which are needed to create a central report. However, despite a recent phone call from Akash promising to send the report the next day, Jack has not received any budget figures. He decides to send this e-mail about the problem to two colleagues with experience of working in India¹.



1. What is the problem from Jack's point of view?
2. How well do you think Jack understands the reason for Akash's behaviour? What other cultural, personality and business reasons could there be?
3. What is Jack's proposal to solve the problem? What other solutions could there be?

Work in pairs (Handout 2)

1. Read the e-mails which Jack receives from his colleagues with advice on dealing with the problem.
2. Tell each other what the e-mails recommended.
3. Decide what would be the best thing for Jack to do.
4. Compare your recommendations with the rest of the class.

¹ Dignen, Bob (2011): Communicating Across Cultures. Cambridge University Press, p. 8f.

→ ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Introduction

Read through the following examples¹:

Which explanation do you find appropriate? What is the Cultural Dimension underlying the example?

1. Latin America. Your Brazilian business partner had agreed to call you at 1:00 p.m.

German time in order to clarify business issues. However, she only called in the evening and left the following message on the voice mail: her mother was sick. But you could reach her the day after tomorrow after 5:00 a.m. Brazilian time on her mobile phone. Try to explain:

- a) Her mother is more important than your business conversation
- b) She forgot phoning and she invented the story as an excuse
- c) She was not in the mood to show up in the office so early

2. China. Your Chinese business partners arrived and they enjoy the ongoing small talks, the drinks and the snacks. You feel that it is time now to show them the conference room and ask them to take a seat. How will you proceed?

- a) "Come in and have a seat – wherever you like. Perhaps opposite the window?"
- b) "We would like the Chinese delegation to sit on this side of the table, please."
- c) "Director Wang, please sit here at the head of the table, and I will be sitting next to you."

3. Germany. A Korean employee wants to speak to his new German colleague. He goes into his office but the German is on the phone. The Korean steps forward and expects a short greeting, but the German doesn't greet him or pay him any attention until he is finished on the phone. What might be the reason for his behaviour?

- a) The Korean worker had done something to offend his German colleague and he doesn't want to speak to him.
- b) Germans often concentrate on one task at a time, multitasking is seen to be stressful and is avoided wherever possible.
- c) The German is unfriendly and impolite.

4. India. You are chatting with your Indian business partner for 10 minutes. In the meantime, the topics on weather and hotels are exhausted. What do you say next?

- a) "I'm terribly sorry, I'm not good at small talk. Shall we get started with the meeting?"
- b) "Well-enough chit-chat. Let's get down to business."
- c) "I am very happy having you here. I hope we can find some time to show you around."

5. China. In a meeting with Chinese colleagues the facilitator asks a question. A Chinese colleague answers the question. You express a contradictory position. Suddenly there is an embarrassed silence. The facilitator disregards your statement and continues with the subject. Why is there no further discussion and why does nobody make a comment on your statement?

- a) You are "only" a foreign visitor and should not have participated in the discussion
- b) Very likely the logic of your arguments has not been understood and nobody wanted to inquire impolitely
- c) You have embarrassed your colleague. The facilitator wanted to ignore the awkward situation.

¹ Some of the examples are taken from the intercultural tests of Carl Duisberg Training Centre, others from students' experiences.

6. Venezuela. A journalist writes a restaurant review column for a newspaper. A close friend of him has invested all his savings in his new restaurant. The journalist has eaten there and thinks the restaurant isn't very good. What will he most likely do?

- a) He still writes a very good restaurant review in order to protect his friend's investment.
- b) He writes a bad review because he thinks the truth is more important than loyalty to his friend.
- c) He refuses to write the restaurant review.

→ **ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Individualism vs. Collectivism**

Watch the video and fill in the table with major features for each culture.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW7aWKXB5J4>

Individualistic Cultures	Collectivistic Cultures

Further examples

A Chinese student in Germany meets an old woman in the street with a shopping trolley on her way home after the shopping. Surprised, he offers her help and asks why her children aren't helping her, since this would be the completely natural thing to do in China.

The woman answers, quite surprised, "But I can do it alone. Why should I let someone help me? Anyway, my children live far away, and I wouldn't want to trouble them, especially for such a simple little thing"¹.



Near the Family² (See CC Dialogues_KEYS)

Cathy: So, Vincenzo, you'll be graduating in May. Congratulations.
 Vincenzo: Thank you.
 Cathy: Do you have a job lined up?
 Vincenzo: Yes, I'll be working for the Banco Central.
 Cathy: Good for you. Have you found a place to live yet?
 Vincenzo: Actually, the bank's near my parents' place.
 Cathy: That's nice. So you'll be living quite near them.

What are cultural assumptions of Cathy (USA) and Vincenzo (Italy) concerning the situation?

¹ Schroll-Machl, Sylvia (2011): *Doing business with Germans. Their perception, our perception.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 201.

² Storti, Craig (2017): *Cross-Cultural Dialogues: 74 brief encounters with cultural differences.* Intercultural Press, p. 19

A Pat on the Back¹ (See *CC Dialogues_KEYS*)

Mr. Kaneda: Are you satisfied then, Ms. Walden, with the work of the accounting division?

Ms. Walden: Very much. Their output has improved tremendously.

Mr. Kaneda: They are very proud of their work.

Ms. Walden: As soon as you put Mr Yamonoto in charge, things began to turn around.

Mr. Kaneda: Yes, the whole team is working very smoothly now.

Ms. Walden: Will you be giving Mr Yamonoto some kind of recognition then?

Mr. Kaneda: Excuse me?

Ms. Walden: You know. An award or something?

Mr. Kaneda: I hardly think so. We wouldn't want to embarrass him after all he has done.

Which Japanese proverb illustrates this situation? How would YOU feel in similar circumstances?

Group work: The group and the individual, *Handout 3*

(1) Look at the quote cards and explore the perspectives about each situation. Speculate about how some of your friends from other cultures might feel about these attitudes and behaviours.

(2) Reflect on your personal reactions to the unfamiliar norms of behaviour related to this cultural dimension, e.g. greetings, wining and dining, making decisions, rewarding for achievements, etc. Share your experiences inside the group.

→ ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Low vs. High Power Distance

Case Study¹

At the subsidiary of a German company in Malaysia: The new German head of the subsidiary presents his plans for the coming months for discussion. He feels insecure and is awaiting feedback from the Malaysian department heads. But they are all smiling, nodding and remained silent. The plan is agreed upon.

In the not too distant future, however, the plan turns out not to be very practical. The Malaysians always thought the plan seemed implausible, but who dares to contradict your boss in public? Especially a new boss!

Further examples: Attitudes to status and hierarchies

Tea³ (See *CC Dialogues_KEYS*)

Mr. Walker: I was wondering, Mr. Singh, if the books I'd ordered had come yet?

Mr. Singh: Yes, yes. The books have arrived at the storehouse.

Mr. Walker: Oh, good. Maybe I can pick them up on my way home from school.

Mr. Singh: No, no. I will send someone to bring them for you.

Mr. Walker: That's very kind, but I don't mind going along. In case they need help.

Mr. Singh: No, no. You wait here, Mr. Walker. And we will drink tea.

What are cultural assumptions of Mr. Walker and Mr. Singh concerning this situation?

¹ Storti (2017): *Cross-Cultural Dialogues: 74 brief encounters with cultural differences*. Intercultural Press, p. 42

² Berninghausen, Jutta; Hecht-el Minshawi, Béatrice (2009): *Intercultural competence. Managing cultural diversity; training handbook*. 2. Aufl. Bremen, Boston, Mass: Kellner, p. 49

³ Storti (2017), p. 44ff.

Writing a Report (See CC Dialogues_KEYS)

Ms. Colson: How is the evaluation going, Ram?
 Ram: It's finished, ma'am. We can start the report anytime now.
 Ms. Colson: Good. How long do you think it will take?
 Ram: Ma'am?
 Ms. Colson: To write a report.
 Ram: I couldn't say, ma'am.
 Ms. Colson: You don't know how long it will take?
 Ram: When would you like it ma'am?
 Ms. Colson: Well, I want to give you enough time to do a good job.
 Ram: We'll do a good job, ma'am.

How do you feel about this situation?

→ ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Use of Time

Test YOUR Cultural Type¹

- In each line: make a cross on the item which fits best for you.
- In the end, **summarize** the crosses for each column.

I usually take the initiative	Sometimes I take the initiative, sometimes I am more reactive	I am more re-acting to proposals of my counterpart
I talk 50% of the time	I talk most of the time	I am listening most of the time
Usually, I am performing one action at a time	I like to be multi-tasking	Sometimes I am focusing on one task, sometimes I am multi-tasking
I plan step-by-step ahead	I only do rough plannings in advance	I follow fundamental principles when planning
To some extent I am covering my feelings	I show my feelings	I cover my feelings
In conflict situations I confront with logic arguments	I always have good excuses	I must not lose my face and the same is true for my counterpart
I rarely interrupt	I interrupt quite often	I don't interrupt
I am task-oriented	I am social-oriented	I am task- and social-oriented
Facts are most important for me	For me, feelings are more important than facts	If I make a statement it is like a promise
Truth for me is more important than diplomacy	Truth is flexible	For me diplomacy is more important than truth
I am polite, but direct	I am emotional	I am polite and indirect

TOTAL: _____

TOTAL: _____

TOTAL: _____

¹ Storti (2017), p. 51ff.

² Kumbruck, Christel; Derboven, Wibke (2009): *Interkulturelles Training. Trainingsmanual zur Förderung interkultureller Kompetenzen in der Arbeit*. 2. Aufl. Berlin: Springer, p.64

Case Study: Bridging the gap - Meeting people from a polychronic culture

A BBC producer often used to visit Europe to visit BBC agents. He never failed to get through his appointments in Denmark and Germany, but always had trouble in Greece. The Greek agent was a popular man in Athens and had to see so many people that he often ran overtime. So he usually missed his appointment or waited three or four hours for the agent to turn up.

Finally, the producer adapted to the multi-active culture. He simply went to the Greek's secretary in late morning and asked for the agent's schedule for the day. As the Greek conducted most of his meetings in hotel rooms or bars, the BBC producer would wait in the hotel lobby and catch him rushing from one appointment to the next. The multi-active Greek, happy to see him, would not hesitate to spend half an hour with him and thus make himself late for his next appointment.

Group work: *Handout 4*, Quote Cards: Attitudes to time

→ ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Deal-focused and Relationship focused cultures

Case Study: Effectiveness vs. Efficiency¹ (highlight cultural dimensions involved in this Case)

A large American telecommunication company introduced a technically superior product on the world market. It planned to focus specifically on increasing sales in Latin America, where it had not been successful previously. The only serious competitor was a French company which had an inferior product, but whose after-sales support was reputedly superior.

The Americans went to great pains to prepare their first presentation in Mexico. "Judgement day" would begin with a video presentation of the company and its growth potential in the medium-long term. After this the vice-president of the group would personally give a presentation to the Mexican minister of communication. Also carefully planned was the two-hour lunch. Knowing Mexican culture, they believed this was where the battle would be fought. The afternoon session was reserved for questions and answers. The company jet would then be ready to leave Mexico City in the last departure "slot". It was tight, efficient and appreciated; right?

Wrong: The Mexican team threw off the schedule right away by arriving one hour later. Then, just when the Americans were introducing the agenda, the minister was called out of the room for an urgent phone call. He returned a while later to find that the meeting had gone without him. The Mexicans were upset that the presentation had proceeded, that the after-sales contract wasn't included into the contract, and that the presentation focused only on the first two years after the installation rather than the longer-term future together.

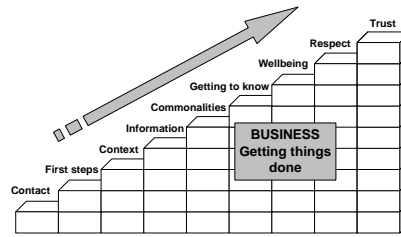
The French, on the other hand, prepared a loosely structured agenda. They determined some of the main goals to be attained by the end of the two-week visit. The timing, the where and the how were dependent on factors beyond their control, so they left them open. A long presentation on the historical background of the French state-owned company was prepared for the minister and his team. It had done business with Mexico's telephone system as early as 1950 and wanted to re-establish a historic partnership. As far as the French were concerned, the after-sales service, which extended indefinitely, was part of the contract. It was the French who received the order for a product known in the industry to be more technologically sophisticated.

Why did the Americans fail to receive the order for the product?

¹Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, Charles (2012): *Riding the Waves of Culture. Understanding diversity in global business*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 12

Establishing initial contact: Trustbuilding

DF cultures: via agreements, contracts, formal meetings, agenda, rules;
 RF cultures: via relationship & getting to know each other



Think of a series of steps involved in establishing initial contact with deal-focused or relationship-focused cultures.

Deal-focused: Direct contact	Relationship-focused: Indirect Contact

Group work: Handout 5, Hosting a visitor. Small talk.

→ ICC-Module 3. Cultural Dimensions: Universalism and Particularism

Case Study: The car and the pedestrian¹

➤ **Read the following case and discuss how you would handle this situation.**

You are riding in the car with a good friend who is driving. He injures a pedestrian. You know that he was travelling at least 50 km/h in a city where the speed limit is only 30 km/h. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says if you swear under oath that he was only driving 30 km/h, you could save him from serious consequences.

How would you most likely react to the conflict between your duty as a witness and a sense of obligation towards your friend?

- (1) Swear that he was driving 30 km/h
- (2) Refuse to swear under oath that he was driving 30 km/h

Business Implications: Contractual Obligations

Case Study 1: Contract is final²

“Six months after the ABC mining company had signed a long-term contract with a buyer the world price of bauxite collapsed. Instead of paying \$4 a ton below world market price, the buyer now faced the prospect of paying \$3 above.

The buyer faxed ABC to say it wished to renegotiate the contract. The final words of the fax read: „You cannot expect us as your new partner to carry alone the now ruinous expense of these contract terms“.

¹ Trompenaars; Hampden-Turner (2012), p. 45ff.

² Trompenaars; Hampden-Turner (2012), p. 60ff.

1. A contract is a contract. It means precisely what its terms say. If the world price had risen, we would not be crying; nor should they. What partnership are they talking about? We had a deal. (> _____ attitude)
2. A contract symbolizes the underlying relationship. It is an honest statement of original intent. Where circumstances transform the mutual spirit of that contract, terms must be renegotiated to preserve the relationship. (> _____ attitude)¹

Case Study 2: Latin Flexibility

Konepaja, a Finnish machine tool firm, discovered the hard way how Brazilians look at the terms of a contract. Their training partner always paid one year late in spite of having signed 90-day clauses. The Finns, unable to apply any moral pressure and unwilling to sue a regular customer, opted for the course of building a one-year wait for payment into their calculations. Everyone was happy with the contract.

Case Study 3: Asian Intent

Kanefo, a large Japanese textile company, sold 1 million white shirts, unwanted in Japan to the Chinese Government's Purchasing Agency for a figure around \$3 per shirt. The shirts subsequently proved unsaleable at the price fixed by the Japanese for their own public. They went back to Kanefo to renegotiate the buying price, which eventually came down to below \$1, whereupon the Chinese bought 4 million shirts.

Language and Culture¹

Language and culture are intertwined. A particular language usually points out to a specific group of people. When you interact with another language, it means that you are also interacting with the culture that speaks the language. There is a very close link between the life of the society and the lexicon of the language spoken by it.

Language as the picture of the world

First layer: Language-specific names for special kinds of things - visible and tangible, international words: food, sports, ships & navigation (keel, cutter), computers, marketing, etc. Polish *bigos*; Russian *blini*; Ukrainian *borshch*; German Klöse; Japanese *sake*; Italian pizza; Turkish *kebab*, Mexican *pozole*.

One layer deeper: Culture-specific words for social rituals, ways of doing things, words and phrases which mirror people's values, their way of thinking about the world.

Japanese *miai* (a formal occasion when prospective bride and her family meet the prospective bridegroom and his family for the first time); German *protzen* (to show off one's money, strength, knowledge); Italian '*Dai!*'; Russian '*Давай!*' (*Davai!*)

¹ Source: <http://www.crossculture.com/latest-news/contractual-obligations-attitudes-to-truth/> (last access 22.04.2022)

Language as the mirror of people's values, their way of thinking about the world

Italy	<i>Volere é potere</i>	If you want you can
France	<i>Savoir-vivre</i>	'Knowing how to live'
USA	<i>the can-do people</i>	'Learning by doing' concept
Russia	'Perhaps' concept'	Maybe it will work out!
Spain	<i>Que sera, sera!</i>	"Whatever will be, will be!"
Pakistan	<i>Sharing is caring.</i>	Children write it in their diaries at school.
Thailand	<i>Mai pen rai</i> , part of 'greng ja' concept	Doesn't matter! Just accept and move on. A Thai concept of not wanting to trouble someone.
Japan	<i>KY – kuki yomenai</i>	People who can't read the air or intuitively understand a given situation and act accordingly
Brazil	<i>Jeitinho Brasileiro</i>	A way of dealing with everyday difficulties using cunning tricks

→ ICC-Module 4. Communication Styles: Low Context and High Context

Difference between Low Context and High Context Cultures

Erin Meyer: *Low Context vs. High Context Societies*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oYfhTC9IIQ>



Low Context Cultures	High Context Cultures

Verbal Communication: Direct vs Indirect

Language Codes¹

Dialogue 1: Rescheduling the meeting

Linda: Hi, Carmen! How are you?
Carmen: Fine, and you?
Linda: I'm OK. I was wondering, Carmen, what would you think if we decided to move up the deadline for the new software release?
Carmen: Move it up?
Linda: Just by a week, at the most.
Carmen: Do you think it is possible?
Linda: Should be. But what do *you* think?
Carmen: You don't see any real problems, then?
Linda: Not really. My people can be ready if your team can get it done by then.

Dialogue 2: Are we still on schedule?

Carol: How's the design coming along, Yang?
Yang: Fine, fine.
Carol: Are we still on schedule?
Yang: Oh yes. We're working extra hard on this.
Carol: Great. My people are anxious to see the new layout.
Yang: Of course. When are they expecting to see it?
Carol: By the end of the week, like we agreed.
Yang: I see.

Common ways of an indirect speaker to say NO:

- simply avoiding the question (e.g. changing the subject);
- giving a negative answer in one of two ways: by saying nothing at all or by sending the question back to the person who asked it;
- say NO by using the word YES followed by BUT or AND + additional information, or even a question;
- never saying anything positive, never saying YES.

Group-work: Direct vs indirect communicators, *Handout 6*

- (1) Get together into small groups, read the dialogues and reflect on cultural assumptions of each side concerning the situation.
- (2) Share the insights inside your group.
- (3) Discuss what direct and indirect communicators might think of each other.

Low context think about High context communicators	High Context think about Low Context communicators

¹ Storti, Craig (2004): *Americans at Work: A Guide to the Can-Do People*. Intercultural Press, pp. 102-105

Further examples: German communication style¹ No Double Meanings

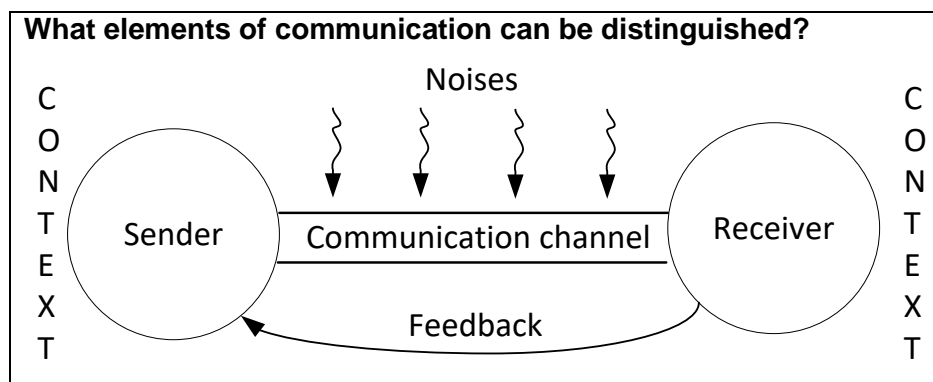
Germans say exactly what they mean

A German engineer has a meeting with a French colleague to discuss a customer's order. The French engineer suggests installing solar panels on the roof of the car. The German engineer argues that the suggestion is not feasible because: a) the solar panels would have to be cleaned regularly, and b) oil would have to be used on the vehicle's roof. Both would increase the maintenance. Two days later the German receives an e-mail from his French colleague, addressed to his boss with a copy to him. The e-mail indicates that the German was uncooperative. The German engineer is very surprised: in his eyes, he had only made objective comments about the problems connected with putting the French engineer's ideas into practice.

Germans understand exactly what has been said

A Spanish project-leader is testing a new programme with serious weaknesses. During a meeting he is worried about what he should say and in the end says that it could potentially be streamlined a little and that perhaps some changes could be made. The German engineers understand his comments to mean just that: that the software, although potentially able to be further improved, is essentially suitable. The Spaniard becomes agitated: why don't the Germans understand that their work is clearly bad? A German colleague supports him and clearly states that this and that is simply bad and unacceptable. The Spanish project leader expects an emotional outburst, which, to his surprise, does not come. The same words of criticism used in Spain would have led to deep feelings of anger, whereas the Germans begin discussing the possibilities for improvement.

→ ICC-Module 4. Communication Styles. Non-Verbal Communication



¹ Schroll-Machl, Sylvia (2011): *Doing business with Germans. Their perception, our perception.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 54 and p. 178

Explicit Communication: Whatever is Important will be Verbalised

Recognising cultural “noises”

An Australian couple have become really good friends with their German neighbour. The German neighbour soon learns that he is welcome to drop in on the Australians at any time without notice. He really enjoys doing this. He often pops by in the evenings. To the chagrin of the Australians, he never notices signals they give him suggesting when it's time to leave. Even if someone becomes restless, or gets up and starts to work, it isn't even seen by him as a signal for him to go home. One day the Australian man loses his patience and says in a way that for him is bordering with rude, "It's really great to have you as a friend and to spend so much time with you, but right now we have something that we must do. Would it be too much to ask you to leave?" This isn't a problem for the German at all! He thanks them for the clear message, says goodbye until next time, and goes home.

Group work: Increasing our awareness of non-verbal communication.

Handout 7 with activity description

Communication Styles across Cultures: 'Take-away' Checklist

- Listen to the other person very carefully and be prepared for the importance of contextual and indirect meanings.
 - When a problem is hinted at, take it seriously. A supposedly small problem may actually be big.
 - Be aware of the implied messages that you may be sending.
 - Choose a private, not a public moment when you need to disagree and deliver your message partly by hints and suggestions.
 - Keep in mind that a "yes" is often meant merely as a polite gesture.
 - Verify understanding: Please, let me know if I communicated clearly ...
Please correct me if I misinterpret what you have said ...
 - Eye contact:** Avoid making negative assumptions about differences in eye contact. When in doubt ask questions to verbally clarify meaning.
 - Facial expressions:** Observe the use of nodding and smiling. Do not assume a positive or negative opinion until you are sure of its meaning.
 - Gestures:** since the use varies widely, don't use gestures a lot. Don't assume that any gesture has universal meaning.
 - Greeting behaviour:** do not initiate kissing or embracing by yourself. Don't back away if someone from a different culture greets you with an embrace
 - Dress** to convey respect for the other culture. Be aware that your dress sends nonverbal messages
 - Silence:** Consider the differing ways that cultures use. Do not rush to fill the silence or be offended if others interrupt you.
-

→ ICC-Module 5. Business Applications: Working in Multicultural Teams

Examples of Multicultural Teamwork

Finding creative solutions¹

Consider a team trying to find the solution for a technical problem. They are all German. They are all male. They are all graduate engineers. They are all in their fifties. They all studied engineering at the same university, and they are all long-service employees in the chemical engineering department of the same company. Do you think they will come up with a range of different ideas relevant to the problem?

Perceptual problems and mistrust²

Research found that team members often inappropriately stereotype colleagues rather than accurately seeing their skills. Members of one team of engineers – for example – assumed their American colleagues had more technological expertise than did their Moroccan colleague simply because Morocco is less economically and technologically advanced than the United States.

Developing an advertising campaign³

Harry, a U.S. American, is the leader of a multicultural team whose task is to develop an advertising campaign for lawn-mowers. He has strong ideas about what the campaign should be like; he talks about it a lot, and tries to persuade his three colleagues. But despite of his strong views, Harry recognizes the value of different ideas. He makes it clear to his colleagues that he welcomes ideas that are better than his.

So far the only person who has responded to Harry's invitation is **Ingrid** from Germany. Her ideas are very different and inwardly she is convinced that she is more competent than Harry. She too talks frequently and forcefully about the campaign. Harry doesn't agree with her, and argues back loudly.

The other two members of the team keep a low profile. **José**, who is of Latin American background, can't stand Ingrid. How dare she talk to the boss like that! Has she no respect for authority? It's not so much that José doesn't agree with Ingrid's ideas – in fact secretly he thinks they are quite good – but he objects to the rude and aggressive way she presents her ideas and the fact that she is treating Harry as if she were equal to him. José would rather cut his arm off than encourage Ingrid by supporting her ideas. So he sides quietly with Harry and wishes Ingrid would go away.

As for Taiwanese **Ming**, she too keeps quiet. Harry says he wants her opinion, but she doesn't think he means it. If he does, why does he argue so aggressively with Ingrid? Ming believes good decisions are made through patient reflection, the respectful exchange of ideas, and the protection of harmony of the group, that will, after all, have to work together to implement the final solution. She wishes she knew how to implement this method with Harry and Ingrid. In the meantime, she puts forward her views when Harry asks her, but so timidly that Harry wonders if Ming herself believes what she is saying.

- **What happens here? Which Cultural Dimensions can you find? Mark them in the text**
- **How can the team collaboration be improved?**

¹ Thomas, David C.; Inkson, Kerr (2003): *Cultural intelligence. People skills for global business*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, p. 154

² Adler, Nancy J.; Gundersen, Allison (2008): *International dimensions of organizational behavior*. 5. ed. Mason, Ohio u.a: Thomson South-Western, p. 136 – adjusted.

³ Thomas, David C.; Inkson, Kerr (2003): *Cultural intelligence. People skills for global business*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, p. 142f. – adjusted.

Leading multicultural teams

Erin Meyer: How to lead a successful international team.

Below is the list of the main points of Erin's talk. What does she say in each case? Which examples does she provide?

- 1 Real challenge on the way of reaching result
- 2 Cultural relativity: English & French, Indians & French
- 3 The meaning of an authority figure to the Mexicans and to the Dutch
- 4 Leadership style in global environment
- 5 Culture Map framework
- 6 Failure degree in mixed teams: the US and the UK
- 7 Face-to-face settings; emails, telephones
- 8 The results of research: way of thinking in Europe and Asia
- 9 The role of the manager



What are Benefits and Challenges of Working in Multicultural Teams?

What makes the group less or more effective?

Group work: You are not on your own! *Handout 8* with activity description

Goal: to raise awareness of necessary stages in successful and effective multicultural group development and to explore concrete ways of enhancing group dynamics


Discussion plenum

How do motivation and leadership correlate? What are the motivation factors in your county?

→ ICC-Module 5. Presentations in front of an international audience

Audience expectations

Look at the notes below which describe audience expectations of sales presentations in different parts of the world¹. Which country is described in each set of the notes?

Finland	UAE	UK	Germany	US	Japan
1 Humour goes down well. A strong and powerful personality is appreciated. A direct sales approach – slogans go down well. Very individualistic culture which requires speaker to 'sell' himself or herself.	2 A formal presentation environment is expected. Communication style is quiet and polite. Knowledge of and respect for the company, its history and its leaders.	3 Clever and eloquent speakers are appreciated. Speakers are expected to entertain and be animated. This is a relationship environment which relies on more than just facts to sell. Selling takes time and will require more than one presentation.	4 Presentation should be serious and focused on data with solid analysis. It should start and finish on time. The audience is unlikely to participate. The audience may expect to hear about the speaker's professional experience in the introduction.		
6 Ironic humour is appreciated. Stories and personal anecdotes and observations work well. Sales language should be moderate and reasonable (overstatement does not go down well).	5 Communication style is relatively formal and quite neutral. Design is also important so the technical and quality features of the product should be stressed. The speaker should not be over-confident.				

Group work

You are giving a presentation on your company and products to another company → What do you do? Which behaviours are culturally-conditioned?

1. Do you stand, sit, walk during your presentation?
2. Do you speak loudly or fairly quietly?
3. Do you tell jokes at the beginning or during your presentation?
4. Do you emphasize how good your product is?
5. Do you compare it to products of competitors?
6. How do you address the people from another company (first name or title and surname)?
7. Do you address individuals at all? Which ones?
8. Who do you look at during your presentation?
9. Do you involve the audience at some point?
10. How do you react if your presentation is interrupted by questions?
11. How do you react if the same question is asked more than once?
12. How do you deal with silences?



Foto www.istockphoto

¹ Dignen, B. (2011): Communicating Across Cultures. Cambridge University Press, p. 26

Presentation Styles Across Cultures

How U.S. Americans might perceive a presentation of Germans

A meeting is about to start¹. It takes place in Frankfurt. Horst Schmidt and Peter Müller, John Smith and Bill Miller meet, all of whom are employed with a large automobile company created by the merger of a German and a U.S. American car producer. The topic is the selection of some new suppliers. As usual in the company, the language is English.

Horst Schmidt and Peter Müller tell their story:

Our meeting begins. We hand the agenda around. Then we present our suggestions in great detail. We began with the preparation quite some time before, so we have been able to collect a lot of data and have it available in writing. Then we had to translate it all into English.

At first our partners listened attentively. They began to put questions during the presentation, but we told them to save them for the following discussion. They then stopped doing it. When we were finished, we wanted to know if there were any questions, but none came.

We felt we'd been taken for a ride. What's the point of a meeting when our partners aren't interested in it? Perhaps they aren't prepared? Don't they have any criticisms?

John Smith and Bill Miller tell their story:

Our meeting begins. Our partners hand the agenda around. Nice that's in English. Then they present their suggestions in great detail. It's a really long-winded presentation with lots of tables and graphics. You can see that they have both put in a lot of effort. Then all of it in English as well.

It was very difficult to follow them. First the accent, then this exhaustive detail. We already knew a lot of it, it was an absolute waste of time. The important thing for us was working out the suggestions together – but it was pointless saying anything. They'd got everything finished and all they wanted was for us to agree with them.

We were frustrated. What was the point of the long flight and all of the effort? Our partners have already planned everything precisely, why get us over for a meeting? All we can do is say 'yes' or 'no'. Actually, they don't need us at all."

- What are the different perspectives toward the presentation?
- What is the reason for the annoyance at each side?
- What could have been done differently?

¹ Roth, J. and Köck, Ch. (2009): Culture Communication Skills. Stuttgart: Edumedia GmbH, p. 66.

→ **ICC-Module 5. Business Applications: Project Management Styles across Cultures**

- (1) Watch the video with Chris Smit and jot down the features which belong to the project management styles of the countries given below.
- (2) Draw a graph for each country (in the margins).
- (3) Discuss with your partner where your home culture belongs.

Project management across cultures	
Germany	
USA, UK	
France Other...?	
Netherlands	

Cultural Dimensions & Communication Styles: Summing-up

Group work: Strategy collage and gallery

Small groups develop strategies for dealing with intercultural situations. The participants' task is to collect and illustrate at least 3 strategies on a chart.

ICC-Module 5: Profiling your intercultural competence



The App: Fons Trompenaars

Riding the waves of culture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmyfjKjcbm0c>

16:50

Individual Intercultural Profile

At heart, intercultural competence depends on an individual's openness to those who are different. This means being able to interact with others positively and experience diversity not as a challenge but as an opportunity.

In order to identify your Intercultural Profile: Read the descriptions below¹ and decide how far they describe your international working style by crossing a number 1-4. Try to be honest.

1= not very significant for you

4 = very significant for you

		1	2	3	4
1	Meeting new people I take a very strong interest in meeting new people from different and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. I like to be the one who makes the first introductions, starts conversations and begins building the relationship.				
2	Being flexible I adapt very easily to many different social and cultural situations. I often experiment with different behavior and change to those which are acceptable and comfortable for others.				
3	Dealing with uncertainty I enjoy variety, change and stimulation in life. I frequently push myself into uncomfortable and ambiguous situations, even if I am unsure if I have the skills needed to succeed.				
4	Understanding how others see me I know how others see me. I am sensitive to how my own communication style and general working behavior can be interpreted – positively and negatively – by my international partners.				
5	Listening actively I think it is important to clarify what others say when communicating internationally. I often ask: " <i>What do you mean ...</i> "? or " <i>Do you mean that ...</i> "? to check that I understood what others have said.				
6	Learning about culture I invest time in learning about different cultures. I get the information in different ways, for example reading, asking colleagues and friends about culture, observing and reflecting.				

¹ Dignen, B. (2011): Communicating Across Cultures. Cambridge University Press, p. 50 - *adjusted*

Intercultural Profile: how to understand your scores¹

1	<p>Meeting new people – Score: 1-2 Your working style is very task-oriented. You probably have the ability to focus on tasks when under time pressure. However, some people may find your approach a little impolite if you do not spend enough time on relationship building → You might want to spend more time in small talk with colleagues, getting to know them and building a personal relationship</p>	<p>Meeting new people – Score: 3-4 Your working style is strongly people-oriented. You probably have the ability to build rapport quickly with many different types of people. However, individuals who are strongly task-oriented may think you spend too much time on small talk and not enough time on getting the job done. → You might want to communicate more quickly about the task and results and spend less time on personal matters.</p>
2	<p>Being flexible – Score: 1-2 You like to be honest and authentic. You don't like to pretend and play roles. You may have the ability to create trust in this way as people will believe what you say is what you really think. However, people may feel uncomfortable with your behavior at times and see you as inflexible in some circumstances. → You might want to observe people more and try to adapt your behavior more to theirs so that they feel comfortable.</p>	<p>Being flexible – Score: 3-4 Your working style is based on a strong people orientation and a preference for harmony in working relationships. You can probably make people feel comfortable with you by adapting to their style. However, some may find trusting you difficult if they see that you change your behavior too much. → You want to show less flexibility in discussions, for example sticking to your opinion more, so that people can see you have a clear position.</p>
3	<p>Dealing with uncertainty – Score: 1-2 You are someone who likes to organize and plan in order to be effective at work. You may find some international situations, where things are uncertain, rather challenging and you may push for clarity too quickly. → You may want to learn taking decisions without all the facts at hand.</p>	<p>Dealing with uncertainty – Score: 3-4 You feel comfortable in situations where things are open and unplanned. You would probably like to learn many new skills rather than specialize and be expert in one area. Some people may think you lack focus at times, especially those who are experts or those who like detail. → You might want to spend more time investigating the details and problems.</p>
4	<p>Understanding how others see me – Score: 1-2 You focus on getting the job done rather than managing people's feelings. However, you may not see that some people find parts of your working style difficult. As a result, you may slow down the process of relationship building, which is often very necessary to reach a business result. → You may want to ask others for feedback more often.</p>	<p>Understanding how others see me – Score: 3-4 You have a good understanding of your own working style and how others will interpret it, either positively or negatively. You probably have the ability to be flexible and adapt your style to make other people feel comfortable. However, you may spend too much time worrying about the opinion of other people rather than getting the job done. → If you feel that you are too sensitive to how others see you, you may want to spend more time reflecting on your own strengths.</p>

¹ Dignen, B. (2011): Communicating Across Cultures. Cambridge University Press, p. 50 - *adjusted*

5	<p>Listening actively – Score: 1-2 You are someone who believes that they can understand what others are saying quickly. You may like to spend less time on communication and more time doing things. However, you may misunderstand others more often than you think. People may think you are a bad listener if you do not spend time commenting on and clarifying what they say to you. → You may want to ask more clarification questions to check that you really understand what people are saying.</p>	<p>Listening actively – Score: 3-4 You are someone who thinks that it is very important to clarify often what people say to you. You probably ask a lot of questions to make sure that you understand the opinion of others. Some people may think that asking a lot of questions in this way shows a lack of expertise in the subject and so may think you are not competent. → You may want to start making more statements that give your opinion clearly and the allow others to clarify or contradict.</p>
6	<p>Learning about culture – Score: 1-2 You feel that it is important to know the individual and not learn about the culture. You may have the ability to form strong interpersonal relationships without a lot of cultural knowledge. However, without knowledge of the wider cultural context, you may manage people in the wrong way or take poor decisions. → Continue to learn and read about foreign cultures.</p>	<p>Learning about culture – Score: 3-4 You believe that it is important to know about the national and organizational cultures of your international partners. You probably have the ability to build respect by showing this knowledge during business conversations. However, you may focus too much on knowledge rather than on adapting your behavior to make others feel comfortable. → You may want to ask others for feedback about your behavior to check that you are converting knowledge into the right actions.</p>

Personal Development Target

Note down two personal development targets, either to improve a skill or to work on a weakness.

I would like to work on the following two dimensions	Action Items

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