




Welcome to the session on working in an intercultural context.
This slide was to put you into the mood of what we will be talking about

Since not everybody has watched our STAMP Webinar on networking and cooperation, there may be a few things you recognize / have already seen, but I think it is important for everybody to see some of it – and if you watch some of it for the 2nd time, it will trigger other reactions.

Working in an intercultural context

- ▶ What is typical for your own culture but may be strange for other culture?
 - Example: Swedish people eating "Sürströmming"
- ▶ Think of a situation you have experienced in which cultural differences produced a misunderstanding
 - Example: I was invited to a birthday party in Ecuador and they told me to come at 6 – when I arrived at 6.15 the host was still in the bathroom and I was told I was far too early



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Let's start by collecting examples at the Board of issues that you can think of in connection with your own country or with things you experienced while travelling – and we will try to sort them according to topics/groups

Working in an intercultural context

- ▶ Rituals and habits / politeness
 - Eating habits / Greeting rituals
- ▶ Language & Non-verbal communication
 - Translation mistakes / false friends / pronunciation
- ▶ Humour / political constraints
- ▶ Working context
 - Time Management
 - Expectation management
 - Dealing with problems/challenges
 - Hierarchies
 - Decision-making processes



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18.12.2020
 EA
 European Association of Universities
 University of Applied Sciences, Technikum Wien, FH Technikum Wien

This could be a list of fields / themes / topics relevant when talking about intercultural differences

FILM on cultural differences



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I would now like to show the little 2-minute film we made for our STAMP Webinar. It was made with my French colleague and myself, and we are trying to play typical representatives of our respective countries (even though in reality we both are not really that typical)

Working in an intercultural context

- ▶ Let's start with a little film showing partners from different countries working on a common project
 - Take notes during the film
 - What is going wrong ?
 - Why?
 - How could this have been avoided?

Cultural Misunderstandings

A note on exaggeration / satire / cliché:



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Sonja: It's a little scene from an intercultural team working on an international, intercultural cooperation project, maybe not very successfully... Try to note down what goes wrong (apart from the bad acting of course) – where do the cultures clash? Where is the cooperation not working ideally?

A note on what you will see. You will quickly recognize that we are exaggerating and using clichés. We know that Germans don't usually act like me and most French people won't act like Côme – fully. We are using exaggerating as a kind of satirical tool to point out what can go wrong. We are fully aware that we are consciously playing with clichés – and clichés are never fully true, never apply to everyone from the country, but usually have a true core.

I am German – but don't drink beer – but the majority of Germans likes beer, and more Germans drink beer than Italians and French people, in average, which does not mean that people in France and Italy never drink beer.



<https://youtu.be/OnH7vrF-VVo>

FILM on cultural differences

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Let's collect some of the issues you identified.

Working in an intercultural context: rituals and habits / politeness rules

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Sonja: In the film, once Côme had reached my office (I will come back to the introduction part later), the first thing we did was to greet each other. I tried to shake hands with him, the typical German thing to do in a formal context, he immediately kissed me. Greeting is the first thing we do when we meet, and yet there are huge intercultural differences and people can be put off immediately by the way they are greeted (also see cartoon from the beginning). At international conferences you can often observe people who do not know how to greet the others – handshake? Kisses? How many? Starting left or right? Hitting the others back? Embracing? Touching foreheads? Bowing as in Japan and other Asian countries?

TIP: At an intercultural training course we once distributed papers with different greeting rituals and we had to greet the others like this. Some were embarrassing rituals for us as Europeans, such as touching noses, so it turned out that a good trick is to announce in advance what you will do. For example as Frenchman “in France we kiss each other on the cheeks even when we meet people at work”. Or if as Estonian you don't want to be kissed, stretch out your hand and say “in Estonia we shake hands to greet each other”

Direct / indirect communication






FIGURE 2.1. ANGLO-DUTCH TRANSLATION GUIDE

| What the British say | What the British mean | What the Dutch understand |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| With all due respect... | I think you are wrong. | He is listening to me. |
| I was a bit disappointed that... | I am very upset and angry that.. | It doesn't really matter. |
| Very interesting... | I don't like it. | He is impressed. |




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We are going to use a book called “The Culture Map” today, published by a Dutch author who prepares people who want to go and work abroad. She lives in the Netherland, so she has used some concrete examples from there.


One issue is about direct / indirect communication, and here are some nice examples between Dutch and English.


Relative differences

example: Punctuality







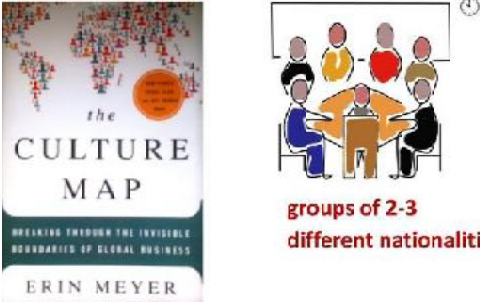
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Many cultural differences are relative ...
For example punctuality

Strict time-keeping

| Strict time-keeping | Flexible time notion | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--------|-------|--------|---------|--|
| Switzerland | Germany | France | Spain | Mexico | Nigeria | |
| Where do you stand? | | | | | | |
| If somebody is 15 minutes late – this may be considered: | | | | | | |
| Too late for a Swiss or German, but on time for a French | | | | | | |
| Too early for somebody from Mexico | | | | | | |
| Irrelevant for somebody from Nigeria? | | | | | | |
| Germans may think French people are always late, but Mexicans may think they are always early | | | | | | |

Working in an intercultural context Work with some graphs



**groups of 2-3
different nationalities!**

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Let's work with some of the graphs in the book
 Get together in groups of 2-3 with different nationalities!
 Work with some graphs from the book
 and analyse for 2-3 graphs, depending on time:
 Where do they stand on the different scales?
 If your country is missing (e.g. Hungary, Estonia) – where do you THINK you stand?
 Which potential conflict could come up between them on the different scales? Can you think of an example from the 1st round or from your experience that fits that scale?


Working in an intercultural context:

Intercultural Differences

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Equality | Germany, Italy | Bureaucratic | Germany, Italy |
| Individual | Germany, Italy | Team | Germany, Italy |
| Risk Avoiding | Germany, Italy | Risk Taking | Germany, Italy |
| Polydram | Germany, Italy | Monodram | Germany, Italy |
| Direct Communication | Germany, Italy | Indirect Communication | Germany, Italy |

CONCLUSION

Compare & respect **tip**



The key to cross-cultural success is to develop an understanding of, and a deep respect for, cultural differences.

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Tip: So in conclusion: If you work in an intercultural context it can be helpful to compare the different paradigms and verbalize certain issues at the beginning of the cooperation. This drawing for example was done for German-Italian cooperation
Tip: In one sentence, the key to success if you want to cooperate with different cultures is respect and understanding for the cultural differences.

Below you will find some more slides from our Webinar



Working in an intercultural context: language / non-verbal communication

- ▶ Speaking a common language – or not?
 - ▶ Differences in pronunciation / False friends
 - ▶ Same word - different meanings in different cultures
- ▶ The danger of using non-verbal communication
 - ▶ Same gesture – different meanings in different cultures
- ▶ Direct / indirect communication
 - ▶ See next slide



Sonja: Our film is dangerously playing with clichés, of course – on the other hand the misunderstandings we are using are all misunderstandings which have happened in real life. When looking at the language question, misunderstandings can happen on different levels:

- We showed two examples where pronunciation differences can lead to misunderstandings: “walking and working” or “hungry and angry”
- There are also the so-called “false friends”, words that may look the same in English and another language but have different meanings. “Sensible” is one example – in some languages it means people feel a lot, are easily hurt (which would be sensitive in English), in English sensible means “it makes sense”
- Words can also have a different cultural context in different languages – When a German says “Brot” and a French “pain”, they mean something different. And we once had a long discussion about midwives, with some Germans suggesting midwives would be the perfect persons to convince parents of the importance of singing with for their babies and the British participants protesting that this made no sense – until we could clarify that midwives in England only deliver the children, while in Germany they do courses to prepare the parents and visit them at home after the birth. I also had a discussion about “singing” in Armenia once, which made no sense to us until we learned that there were two different words in Armenian, both translated as “singing” in English.
- And last but not least we sometimes use “EU-talk” words that not everybody will understand.

As we demonstrated in the film, **non-verbal communication** can also be dangerous – we sometimes believe that non-verbal communication can be the key to communicating when language does not help, but this is not really true. Apart from the circle sign we used – which is even an obscene gesture in some countries, there are many other gestures that have different meanings in different countries, even the thumbs-up symbol used on Social Media is an obscene gesture in some cultures. And once in China I tried to buy one piece of fruit and never understood why the lady did not give it to me but

Working in an intercultural context: humour / political constraints

- ▶ Humour is not universal
- ▶ Not everybody understands the same humour
- ▶ Political topics can be dangerous ground



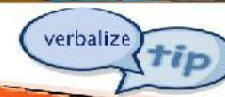
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Sonja: In the film *Côme* is making a joke about the Germans related to the 2nd World War – and I react quite strongly to it. Humour is always a dangerous issue – sometimes you may be making fun about something other cultures don't want to make fun about, sometimes it may simply not be understood. You should also be careful discussing politics – in some countries / cultures it may not be very welcome if guests give their opinion about political matters. At the Opening dinner of the recent Culture Action Europe conference in Rome, one of the hosts, from the British Council, recommended to us not to mention the Brexit.

TIP: Be careful with humour – it is not universal! Carefully check for reactions of the others and apologize if needed. Avoid talking about political issues when you are not sure this will be accepted / ok.

Working in an intercultural context: Issues relevant when working together



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Sonja: Let's turn to the work context. We have said before and will repeat it in the context of the next points, that you walk on thin ice when you want to prepare teams for intercultural differences. Where is the line between explaining cultural differences and reinforcing/underlining prejudices? What can you explain with cultural differences and what are personal character traits? A German individual may, for example, permanently be late even though the "cultural standard" in Germany is rather to be on time. What you can say is that since this person lives in Germany, his coming to late is something people will remark on – while it may be normal in other countries.

Tip: Verbalizing cultural differences (despite the danger mentioned before) can help you avoid bad feelings.

Now we would like to know from you, if you have ever experienced difficulties

Working in an intercultural context: Issues relevant when working together

- ▶ Time Management and scheduling

agree **tip**

FIGURE 8.1. SCHEDULING

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------|---------------|
| Germany | Japan | Netherlands | Poland | Spain/Italy | Brazil/China | Saudi Arabia | | |
| Switzerland | Sweden | US | UK | Czech Republic | France | Russia | Mexico | India/Nigeria |
| | Denmark | | | | | | Turkey | Kenya |

← Linear time → Flexible time

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Sonja: I will now show some more excerpts from the book “the Culture Map” In this book Erin Meyer shows that all cultural differences are relative and you may have to compare where the different countries “stand” when you are cooperating internationally. Here are some examples. Our film started with a typical difference in time management. Germans expect people to come to meetings on time, French people will not apologize if they are late 10 or 15 minutes, in Latin America you can be one hour late without the others getting angry and in some African countries time is an even more relative notion. This also means that a Frenchman may seem late for a German but not for a Spanish person. And Swiss people may think that Germans are not very punctual (at least in the train system this is certainly true ;-). Erin Meyer also speaks about scheduling – which in some countries is “linear”, so you do one thing at the time, one after the other, and deadlines and schedules are important / in other countries there is a more flexible notion of time and you may change tasks as opportunities arise.

Working in an intercultural context: Issues relevant when working together

- ▶ Expectation management / trust
- ▶ Dealing with challenges and problems

Clarify & address **tip**



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Sonja: In the film, I was expecting Côme to deliver things on time according to schedule, and to share with me if this was not possible due to specific challenges. Some countries like the Netherlands and Germany are used to sharing processes – including problems or challenges – thinking that then solutions can also be discussed and found together, in other countries the aim is to share results and not to talk about problems until you can present the solution to them. Other cultures are more based on mutual trust rather than deadlines, and checking on the results by the others.

Tip: Try to clarify expectations early in the cooperation process and repeat them regularly. Address the issue of challenges and how to deal with them clearly in your communication – we are working on a common project, so we want to share all of it, not only the success.

Working in an intercultural context: Issues relevant when working together

- ▶ Hierarchies
- ▶ Decision-making processes



Networking and Cooperating within Europe and beyond



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Sonja: Hierarchy is something which is also perceived very differently in different countries, though we did not speak about this in the film. It can especially be important when working with non-European countries, but also partly within Europe. E.g. in the Netherlands hierarchy is not very important, in Russia or in Africa the CEO of a company can lose the respect of his staff because he, as boss, is cycling to work.

This is also often reflected in decision-making process: In some countries decisions have to be taken with a consensus – together, with everybody agreeing, in other countries decision-taking can be more “top-down”, the boss decides....

Tip: If you work in a team with people from different cultures, try to find out what they are used to / expecting, point to the different traditions and clarify how decisions will be taken in the context of this project

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Thank you for attending

