

17 Cultural differences

Paul Emmerson

1 Many books about multicultural management suggest that the world can be divided into three geographical groups:

- 1 North America
- 2 Europe, Latin America, Middle East
- 3 Japan, China, East Asia

Try to match the groups to the descriptions below. Write the number 1–3 in the box.

<p>Company values</p> <p>a <input type="checkbox"/> Group harmony, long-term relationships, loyalty, company reputation.</p> <p>b <input type="checkbox"/> Trust between individuals, compromise, personal reputation. People work to live.</p> <p>c <input type="checkbox"/> Competition between individuals, achievement, action, risk-taking, directness, informality, innovation. People live to work.</p>	<p>Business relationships</p> <p>a <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly and informal, but a continuing personal relationship is not so important. Much business is done over the phone.</p> <p>b <input type="checkbox"/> Done on a group basis, although relationships based on mutual respect are important. Often there is an older authority figure who rarely appears but has ultimate power.</p> <p>c <input type="checkbox"/> Personal relationships are very important. Some time is needed to build trust before business can begin. Preference for doing business face to face.</p>
<p>Meetings</p> <p>a <input type="checkbox"/> Objective is to gather information. Communication style is often ‘monologue – pause – monologue’ rather than dialogue. Arguments are often indirect, and there are no sudden changes of viewpoint in meetings. Decisions are made by group consensus over a long time period.</p> <p>b <input type="checkbox"/> Objective is to make a deal or decision. Communication style is direct, factual, informal and at times confrontational. Decisions are based on facts, and are often made instantly in the meeting.</p> <p>c <input type="checkbox"/> Objective is to establish relationships, build understanding, clarify, and issue instructions. Communication style depends on national culture. Decisions are made by key individuals, outside the meeting.</p>	<p>Presentations</p> <p>a <input type="checkbox"/> Complicated language may be used to show education. Audience expects formality and a logical structure, but a touch of imagination is also appreciated. May want a more personal ‘extra’ talk afterwards where you tell them the ‘truth’.</p> <p>b <input type="checkbox"/> Indirect, conservative language. Audience appreciates a quiet, formal presentation with visual aids and lots of opportunity to ask questions and check understanding. They expect separate handouts, prepared for different people, by job function.</p> <p>c <input type="checkbox"/> Direct, simple language. Audience expects jokes, modernity, logic, slogans, informality and a hard sell. Audience may ask questions or interrupt while someone is speaking, and will openly question inconsistent facts.</p>

2 Discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.

- a Did you get the same answers as other people? If you did, does it mean the differences are real?
- b Does your own country match the description of its particular group? How is it different?
- c How do individual countries in your geographical group differ from each other?
- d In which ways is globalisation making business more similar, reducing cultural differences? Which cultural differences remain strong, resisting the effects of globalisation?
- e Is globalisation just a polite way of saying Americanisation?