



Globalization & Culture

Communicating Cross-Culturally:

How Americans are Viewed Abroad in
General and by the French Specifically



“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others”

~ Anthony Robbins

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Global Perception of Americans



American Values, Hofstede's Model & Management Practices

“She's American. She shows her emotions, doesn't hide them and tell you what you want to hear. She behaves genuinely and impulsively. That is part of her appeal.”

— [Annie Ward, *The Making of June*](#)

Global Attributes of Americans

Positive

- Industrious
- Energetic
- Inventive
- Decisive
- Friendly
- Sophisticated

Negative

- Rude
- Self-indulgent
- Materialistic
- Arrogant
- Ignorant
- Litigious

Many Americans are surprised to discover that foreigners see them as hurried, overly law-abiding, very hard-working, extremely explicit and overly inquisitive

Global View of Americans

Examples of How Other Countries See Americans

- **Australia:** “American teachers never seem to stop going to school themselves.”
- **Turkey:** “Why do American drivers stop at stop signs when there are no other cars around?”
- **Colombia:** “Work seems to be their one type of motivation.”
- **Japan:** “Americans still feel the need to say things that are obvious.”
- **Vietnam:** “Americans are handy people. They do almost everything in the house themselves.”
- **Iran:** “I was shocked when an American professor admitted he had to look an answer up because he didn’t know it. That would never happen here.”
- **The Netherlands:** “I was shocked at an American supermarket when I saw nothing but large or extra large eggs. I guess small eggs don’t exist because they’re bad or denigrating.”

Hofstede's 6-D Model

Definition of Hofstede's Model

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication, developed by Geert Hofstede. It describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, using a structure derived from factor analysis.

The theory has been widely used in several fields as a paradigm for research, particularly in cross-cultural psychology, international management, and cross-cultural communication.

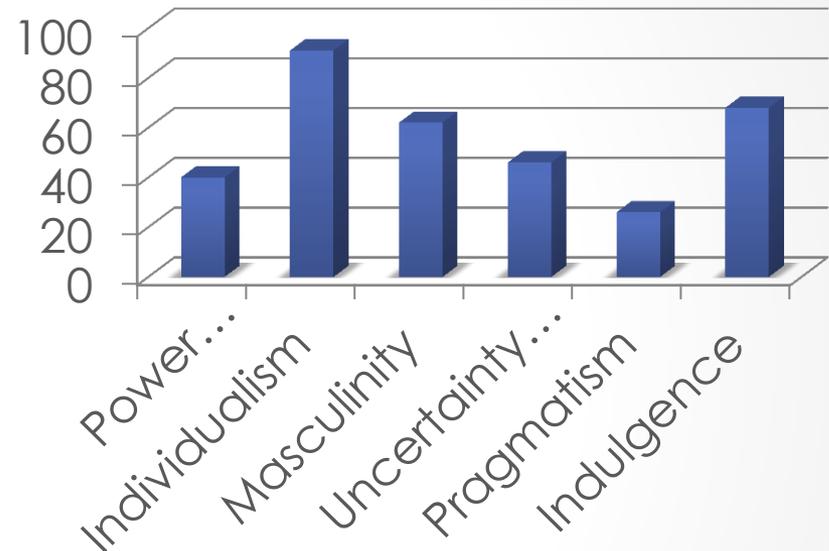
(Wikipedia)

Hofstede's 6-D Model

Category Definitions

1. **Power Distance:** The attitude of a culture toward power inequalities amongst a group
2. **Individualism:** The degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members
3. **Masculinity:** What motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what one does (feminine)
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance:** The attitude towards the fact that the future can never be known
5. **Pragmatism:** How people in the past, as well as today, relate to the fact that so much of what happens around us cannot be explained
6. **Indulgence:** The extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses

United States



Similar to many westernized nations, the U.S. scores high on Individualism and indulgence and lowest on Pragmatism

General American Values

- Change is good
- Finish on time
- Equality / Egalitarianism
- Individual privacy
- Self-help credit
- Competition is healthy
- The future brings happiness
- Action > Inaction
- Control over environment
- Openness and honesty
- Practicality drives decisions
- Material acquisition



Impressive **scientific** and
technological achievement

American Management Practices

When communicating abroad, Americans tend to bring the following bias:

- Moderate power distance
- Low uncertainty avoidance
- Low-context communication style
- Monochronic time view
- Systematic organization style
- Universalistic view of life
- “Doing” orientation to activity



American Business Ethics

Source

Highly transient and geographically disperse society



Relationships more impersonal and quasi legal



Values

Operate within the framework of the law



Legal contracts are the basis of business relationships

Geographic and historical conditions created an environment where people were dispersed and pursue individual endeavors. This created a need for strong legal agreements and, therefore, a general understanding that bounds of business relationships are determined by such agreements

America as Viewed by the BRIC Countries

BRAZIL – RUSSIA – INDIA – CHINA

Goldman Sachs forecasted that China and India would become the first and largest economies by 2050, Brazil and Russia would claim fifth and sixth place

South Africa joined BRIC countries in 2010 – this section focuses on the original four countries



Why the Focus on BRIC?

Economy Watch, Content Team

BRIC-Acronym for: Brazil-Russia-India-China. These nations are both the fastest growing and largest emerging market economies -- They account for almost three billion people, or just under half of the total population of the world.

Note: South Africa was invited and joined in 2010 – becoming BRICS.

Herman Miller
Research

Companies who want to establish a presence in these countries will have to understand cultural norms and work styles and how they shape the work environment...one that addresses the culture of the group and the humanity of the individual.

Bringing in expats to these countries to lead organizations... has proven expensive and challenging as on-boarding and cultural assimilation can be barriers to success for “imported” executives – language, habits, and ability to cope with sometimes unconventional ways of doing business are the key culprits.

Ana Dutra, Forbes Magazine

Globalization, technological change, social responsibility, competition. Imagine having to orchestrate limited resources in the face of these opportunities and threats. Individuals are needed who can lead leaders through difficult choices and drive actions toward valued goals.

Julie Chesley, PhD
Pepperdine MSOD Director



U.S. & BRIC

Country	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Pragmatism	Indulgence
USA	40	91	62	46	26	68
Brazil	69	38	49	76	44	59
Russia	93	39	36	95	81	20
India	77	48	56	40	51	26
China	80	20	66	30	87	24

Natural cultural dimensions – Geert Hofstede



Liberty and justice for all

Work hard Play hard



Passionate and demonstrative
Realize impulses to enjoy life and have fun



Relationships are crucial in obtaining information
Implicit Communication



Appreciation for hierarchy
Almost familial protection by Employer



Act in interest of group over individual
Ability to adapt traditions and persevere

Brazil



What's Your Opinion of the US?

- People live to work, materialistic
- Know-it-all's, want to explain every detail
- Career-oriented, don't take time to enjoy life
- Way too much concern over timeliness
- Undervalue relationships when negotiating
- Technologically savvy
- Ambitious and generous
- Obsessive about sports and gambling
- Disrespectful of other's traditions
- Addicted to fast-food
- Education is highly valued

"It is true that labeling people from a certain ethnic group as "bad" is not ethical, but grouping individuals into categories is neither good or bad – it simply reduces complexity to manageable proportions."

Nancy Adler, International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior (2008)

Russia



What's Your Opinion of the US?

- "In the American mind, change is seen as an indisputably good condition. Change is strongly linked to development, improvement, progress, and growth."
- "American's language is filled with references to time, giving a clear indication of how much it is valued. Time is something to be on, to be kept, filled, saved, used, spent, wasted, lost, gained, planned, given, made the most of, even "killed."
- "Many Americans are addicted to work and leave no or little time for rest and relaxation. I lived in an American family for about 10 months and had a lot of opportunities to become convinced of this."
- "What the Americans call Informality and Directness I would call rudeness and lack of upbringing."
- "Americans got used to the thought that they should not do any job without being sure that they would get something for it. They make money out of everything."

American Values Through Russian Eyes, Olga Zatsepina, PhD

"While it is important to understand and respect the other culture's point of view, it is not necessary to either accept or adopt it." Nancy Adler (2008)

India



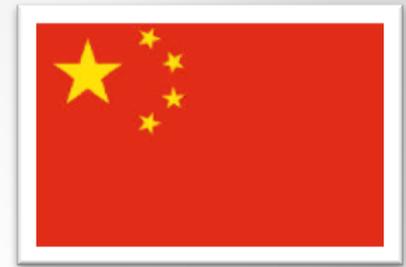
What's Your Opinion of the US?

- Not very religious
- Most people own guns
- Higher drug use and similar vices than in India
- Never allow themselves the leisure to enjoy life; too many things to do
- Very high crime rate
- Selfish and self-centered
- Lack of respect and appreciation for the elderly
- Don't speak proper English
- Dress too provocatively
- Charitable and helpful

"Perception is selective, culturally determined, and inaccurate. We are not born seeing the world in a particular way; rather, experience teaches us to perceive the world in specific ways.

Nancy Adler (2008)

China



What's Your Opinion of the US?

- “My deepest impression about America is Wall Street and its financial industry. Also, Americans are polite.” 23, 7-Eleven Cashier
- “America is rich and things there aren't expensive. Meat is cheap, but the price of vegetables is higher. And many Americans are fat. 18, high school student
- “Americans are bad and they're trying to split every country into two, like China, Korea, and the Soviet Union...wants to be the world police and take over the world.” 43, restaurant owner
- “America is a free and democratic country, with good social rules and civilized people.” 67, technician
- Although China runs trade surpluses with the US and holds large amount of US debt, China's leading political analysts believe the Americans get the better end of the deal by using cheap Chinese labor and credit to live beyond their means.
- Believe that China will not rule the world unless the United States withdraws from it.

“Although we may think that the biggest obstacle to conducting business around the world is understanding foreigners, the greater difficulty actually involves becoming aware of our own cultural conditioning.”

Nancy Adler

• [Fat, Pompous, Free: How Chinese View America](#)

Adler, N. (2008). International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior (5th edition). Cincinnati, OH: Southwestern College Publishing.

French Perception of Americans

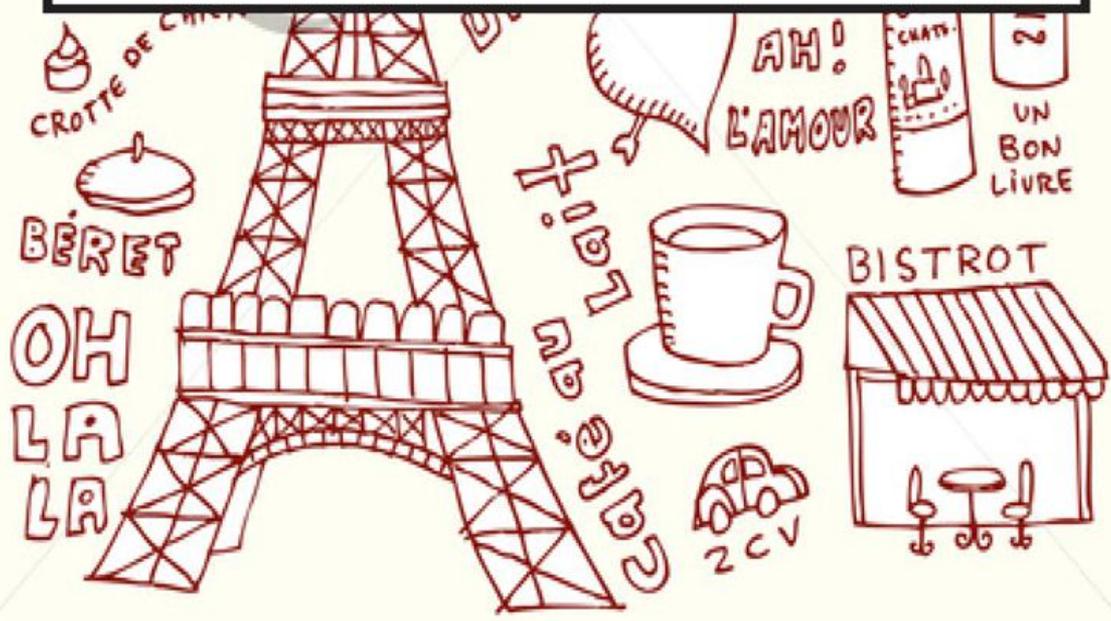


Now that we have reviewed a global view of Americans and provided some details regarding the BRIC countries' views, let's take a deeper look at the French view of Americans

“Americans are just beginning to regard food the way the French always have. Dinner is not what you do in the evening before something else. Dinner is the evening.”



*Oh la la...
A French Fete!*



Americans in France



Characteristics French
Most Commonly
Associate with Americans

Industrious
Energetic
Inventive
Decisive
Friendly

Characteristics French
Least Commonly
Associate with Americans

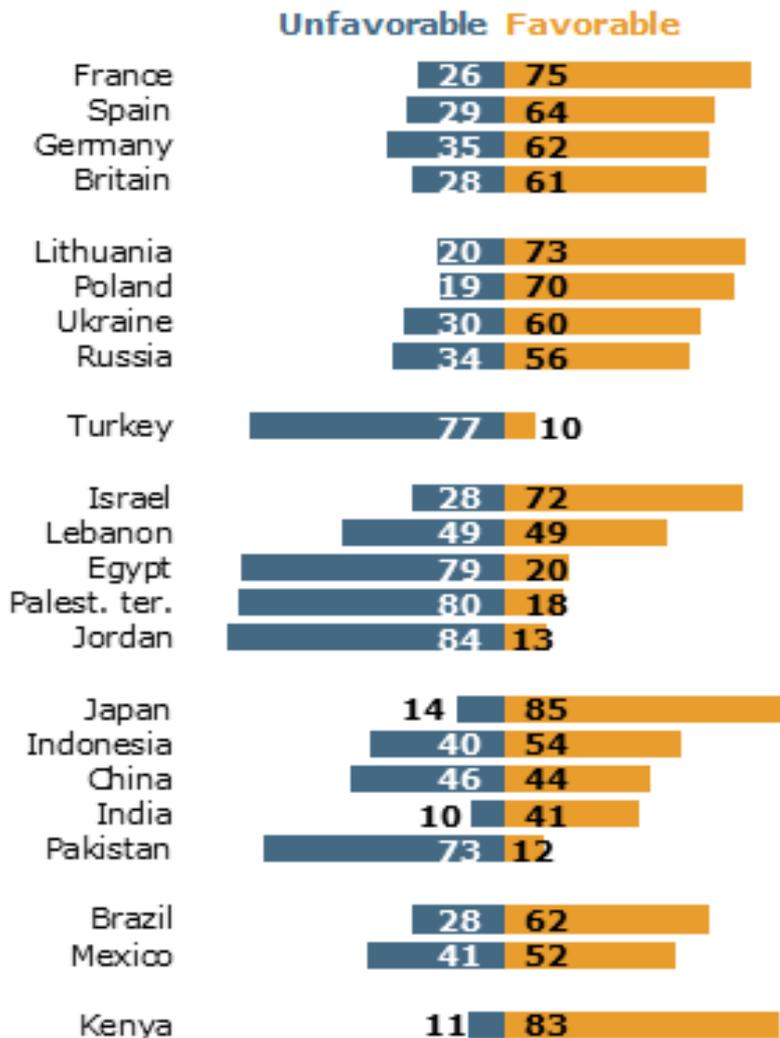
Lazy
Rude
Honest
Sophisticated

The French tend to be highly deductive. North Americans, particularly US Americans, tend to be highly inductive. People in cultures with a deductive thinking style are comfortable with abstractions. In an argument, discussion or written presentation, they prefer to go from the general to the specific and to deduce facts from general principles.

Cultural Traps: If you come from a culture with an inductive thinking style, you may become impatient with negotiating partners whose thinking style is deductive. You may wish to start with a discussion of specific items but your negotiating partners may insist on beginning with a discussion of general principles.

French Perception of U.S.

U.S. Favorability



Contrary to what many Americans believe, the image of the USA in France is very good and the French have a relatively good knowledge of the country and of its culture, certainly much better than the knowledge of France by Americans.

The image of America and Americans is very positive in France and it is easy to see that the French love American movies, the American way of life etc.. and admire American society. It is also a fact that Americans, as persons, are considered very friendly and never subject to aggressive behavior from French people.

Nevertheless, European and French anti-Americanism does exist and it has taken, throughout history, several forms in largely spread stereotypes.

Anti-American Stereotypes

The French see the Americans as ...

- Arrogant and sure they are always right and good, moralizing and very religious
- *Les grands enfants* (ie, people who are naive and have no, or a too short, history)
- People who have free access to guns and who use them to shoot each other when things go wrong
- People who are arch-capitalists and only think about money
- People who do not understand other nations and whose press never addresses international issues
- People who do not take criticism
- For an American it is hard to conceive that a country operating as French can be the fifth world economic power



*DID YOU KNOW THAT....
Among the major European countries, France is the only one which has never been at war with the USA, as opposed to UK (1776 & 1812), Germany (1917 & 1941), Spain (1898), Italy (1942) and Russia (Cold War).*

Stereotypical Differences



- FRENCH are highly implicit pessimist and negative : value past ; good at analysis and criticism
- contextual: "it depends"
- like what is complex
- lying is no big deal
- want to be independent
- based on being a member of a group
- try not to get caught; signing a contract is just the beginning
- the contract is strongly associated with the relationship
- if the other one wins, it means that I'll lose
- BEING: you are judged on what you are
- value quality of life

*French kids learn the principle of authority.
Their mother says: "be good".*



- AMERICANS are highly explicit optimistic and positive : value present and future; good at action
- binary: "it is true or false"
- like what is simple
- do not lie (it is bad)
- want to be loved
- social identity is based on the individual
- law and contracts must be respected; everything is in the contract once it is signed
- a contract is not linked to the relationship
- process oriented: everything must be clear and documented; reacts as planned
- try to get a win-win deal
- DOING: you are judged on what you do
- value quality of work

Schools help American kids become independent and autonomous.

Their mother says: "have fun"

Intercultural Differences

				
	French are	French Seen by Americans	American are	Americans Seen by French
Context	HIGHT CONTEXT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a place must be left for adaptation and interpretation • everything is in the relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disorganized • unsincere • not disciplined 	LOW CONTEXT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everything must be clear • everything is in the contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boring • disrespectful • not creative
Time	POLYCHRONIC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schedule independent • you can be late if you had something better to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not focused • dispersed 	MONOCHRONIC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time is money • exactitude is essential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • too much into details • bureaucratic
Interpersonal Distance	SMALL BUBBLE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • security is being part of a group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch you too much 	BIG BUBBLE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid physical contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arrogant and dominating

Business Differences

 American Impression of the	 French Impression of the American
People like to know a little bit of everything	Each person is a specialist in his/her own fields
People work in the middle of everyone else	People work individually to do the job they are paid for without questioning anything
People like to know what everyone else is doing	People don't look left or right, they go straight ahead with their specific job
Decisions are rarely without discussion and argument	When a decision is taken, there is a 'steam roller' effect and no argument
It's difficult to get rid of everyone	There's little job security. People are hired and fired with no reason or argument within 15 days
There's a clear hierarchy - people even seem to be over-supervised	People are superficially relaxed but the boss is the boss
Seniority is by age and ascribed.	Seniority is by merit and achievement
If you make a mistake, you will admit to it	If you make a mistake, you're proud to admit it

Role of Management in France

- Expert
- Give precise answers to maintain
- credibility

Role of Management in U.S.

- Problem solver
- Providing direct answers diminishes initiative, creativity & productivity •

Non-Verbal Communication



		
Make him count 1,2,3,4,...	French will start with the thumb and end with the little finger	An American will start with the little finger, and end with the thumb
Make him walk	French will be much stiffer	An American will move his arms and take-up a lot of space
Put him in an elevator	French will try to avoid any eye contact	An American will talk about anything
Make him say "everything is OK"	French will put his thumb upright	An American will form a circle joining his thumb and index (in French, this gesture means : "zero")
Make him hug	French, like the Spanish with his abrazo, will actually touch the body of the other person and act as if he was enjoying it	An American will look as if he was afraid of bad breath, stay as far as possible and give a big slap on the back of the other person
Enjoy a meal with him	French will put his bread on the table and put his hands on the table	An American will put his bread on his plate and will put his hands on his thighs

Famous Quotes

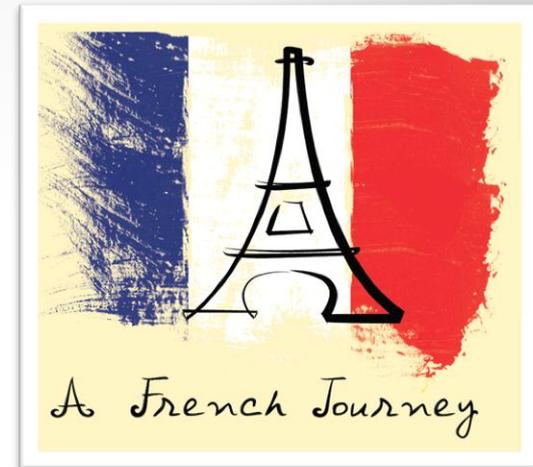


- In Paris they simply stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language (Mark Twain)
- The French complain of everything, and always (Bonaparte)
- You know the trouble with the French, they don't even have a word for "entrepreneur" (G.W.Bush)
- What's the quickest way to make a profit? Buy a Frenchman for what he's worth and sell him for what he thinks he's worth.



- America is the only nation in history which miraculously has gone directly from barbarism to degeneration without the usual interval of civilization (Georges Clémenceau)
- When good Americans die, they go to Paris (Oscar Wilde)
- How it is difficult for Americans even those of good will to not consider themselves the center of the universe! (Simone de Beauvoir)
- Nothing will amaze an American. (Jules Verne)

Understanding the French Perception



“The most difficult skill in communicating across cultures involves standing back from yourself; becoming aware that you do not know everything, that a situation may not make sense, that your guesses may be wrong, and that the ambiguity in the situation may continue. In this sense the ancient Roman dictum “knowledge is power” becomes true. Having the awareness, you can control your own behavior and reactions to others.” (Adler)

Understanding the salient business, cultural and organizational issues makes it possible to be a player on the global stage and effectively conduct business as an OD practitioner.

MISperception

MISinterpretation

MISevaluation

MIStrust



25



French Communication Style

The French conversation style, especially in business, puts an **emphasis on being direct and questioning**. The French are most receptive to rational presentations that are well organized and presented, and will respect a lowkey manner (avoid yelling, handwaving or hyperbole) used to **clearly highlight benefits**.

Arguing is a frequent aspect of business negotiation, but this is not about winning a point, or about intimidation: this is a way to analyze positions, again through a dependence on and **great respect for logical thought**, with a lack of logic viewed as at best sloppy and at worst lacking in intelligence or merit. Business discussions are intellectual exercises, and should be treated as such.

How you argue a position in France is often as important as the argument itself, and serves as a clear indicator that you take the work seriously and are capable of nuanced thought.

Eloquence is seen as a cardinal virtue in France, and French managers have been known to rise to their positions, and run their businesses, in part through the force of their rhetoric. Longterm relationships are a staple of French business dealing, and getting to know a person is done in part through reading how they present themselves and their ideas.



Impact of Culture on Business



The French way of doing business is very closely connected to French culture. French people, especially those in business, couple a deep pride in their own country with an abiding curiosity about other cultures, and **respect someone who can speak about their country's culture, history and politics in an educated and eloquent way.**

Cultural cues are especially important in France because of the rigid barriers most Frenchmen and women draw between their public and private lives, and the **hierarchical system** in which France's business world operates.

France puts a premium on individuality, which allows for both freedom of opinion and **very separate social and personal lives.** This same principle extends to a **cultural mistrust of uncertainty and ambiguity in business,** with strict **attention to rules and regulations,** allowing everyone to know their place even as friendships within a set social circle prove intimate and incredibly longlasting.



Impact of History on Biz-Society

The history of France - cultural, socioeconomic and legal traditions – influence the ideas, expectations and practices within the country. The French State has played a central role in the traditional practices, and in the process of changing these practices.

France is one of the world's largest economies and it remains characterized by the significance of the public sector. This **economic structure is very different** from those that prevail in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and this influences the relationship between business and society. Government interference through formal laws in labor-management relationships and in management is widely accepted. The Jacobean tradition of “State monopoly on providing for the general interest of society” finds its roots in the French Revolution.

Features of French business-society relations that differentiate the French culture:

- The strong role of the State
- Mistrust toward private actors to provide general good
- Certain skepticism toward transparency
- Whereas codes of conduct in the U.S. companies are mostly adopted unilaterally by top management, the French labor law requires companies to inform and consult with the workers' representatives.



Impact of Biz Setup on Economy

For the state as regulator, it has protected the French economy from extreme volatility, but that goes for the upside too. A more stable economy also means a less dynamic, less innovative economy. For all its positive elements, the French model has not yet incorporated enough flexibility, leaving it with the task of ensuring solidarity, but not the dynamic growth needed to sustain it.

As a provider, the government taxes employers and employees with such heavy social-security contributions to pay for all the health and welfare that it ends up deterring firms from creating jobs in the first place.

One reason why French workers are more productive per hour than Americans is that firms employ so few of them. Many make widespread use of rotating interns and temps. France's jobless rate (8.6%) may now be the same as America's (8.5%). But, unlike America's, it never falls much below 8% even in good times.

The Colbertist engineering French culture is much better at devising and managing big planned projects than it is at dealing with bottom-up ideas and uncertain markets. France lacks start-ups, and its small firms have difficulty growing. Hardly any of the biggest companies listed on the Paris bourse were founded in the past 50 years.

Communicating with the French

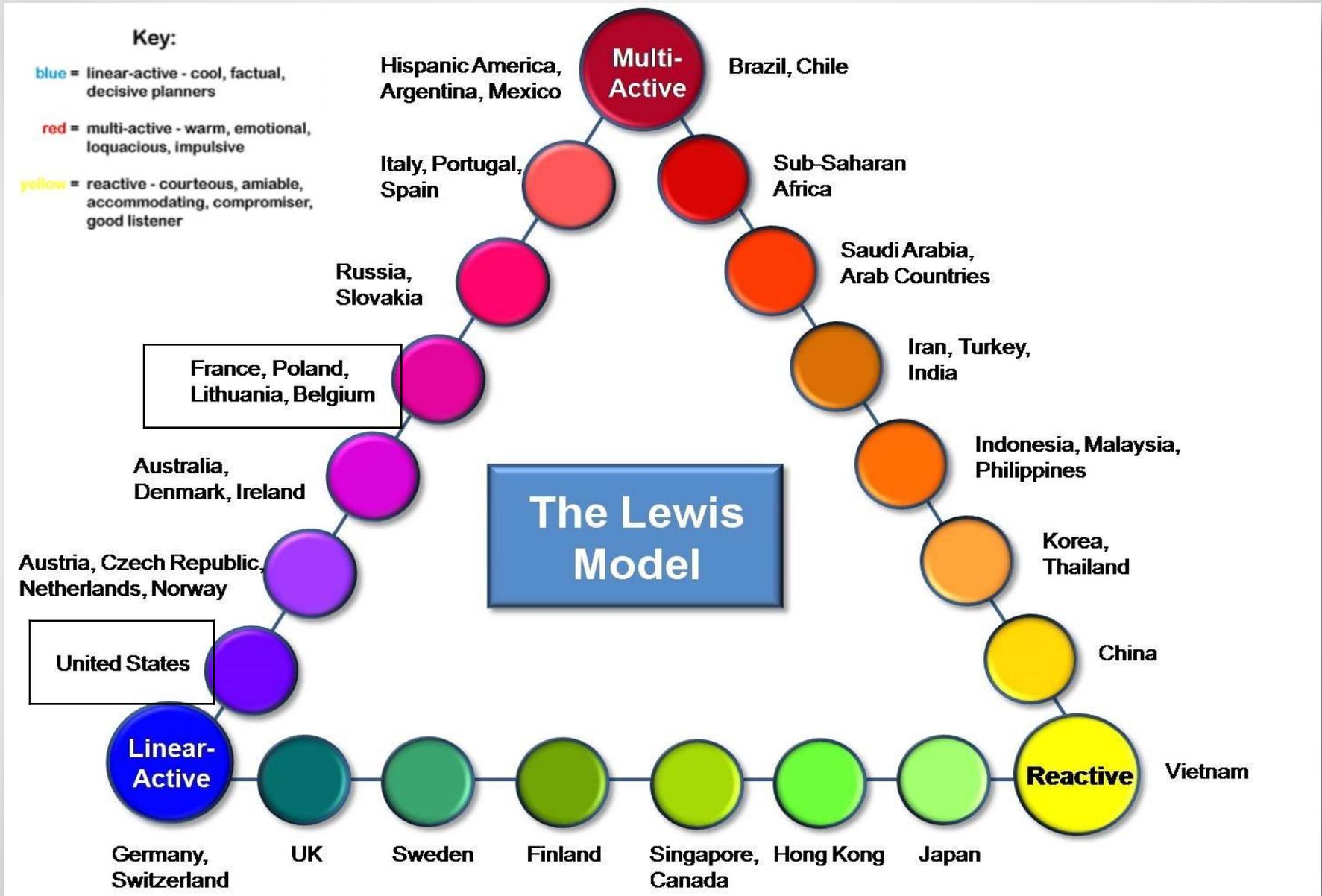
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Understanding how Americans are viewed by the French is important. Understanding how this translates to effective daily communication with the French is even more important

“Boy, those French! They have a different word for everything.”

— [Steve Martin](#)

Lewis Model of Cross Cultural Communication



A Word of Caution about Communication...

The greater the difference between senders' and receivers' backgrounds, the greater the difference in the meanings they attach to particular words and behaviors. – Adler



Tips for Communicating with the French

Learn some French!

- The French are extremely proud of their language, and there may not be another culture that so regards the language it speaks as such a symbol of the country itself
- While English is widely spoken, the French expect you to respect their language and at least make an attempt to learn basic conversational phrases
- One should apologize early for lack of fluency in French

Debate is appreciated and expected

- The French communication style is filled with interruption and questioning, to communicate effectively, learn to question, interject, and defend your views
- Arguments are seen as a logical step in presenting an opinion – these arguments are typically not dramatic and are kept low-key. Do not confuse debate with conflict

Correspondence is formal

- Written correspondence is formal and impersonal, the French do not often mix personal information with business issues
- In written and verbal communication, use titles and formal greetings (bon jour, bon soir, sil vous plait, etc...)
- The French are very observant of rank, men will stand up when a superior enters the room

Communicate within boundaries

- In a business setting avoid asking personal questions unless invited to do so. The French maintain a boundary between personal and professional lives.
- The French love to talk about food – this is an easy and safe subject to cover with them

Tips for Communicating with the French

Beware of Humor

- Attempting to be funny is not recommended unless you speak the language well and understand their type of humor and culture

Business lunches are a “way of life”

- However, the “business” might not be spoken of until the very end and sometimes not at all

Presentations should be formal and well-prepared

- The French appreciate a logical, rational, professional, and comprehensive approach to presentations
- PowerPoint presentations should be deductive instead of inductive – build up to the conclusion with logic and rationality and then present the findings rather than the other way around

Beware of status and “hard luck” stories

- The French shy away from speaking of earnings, money, or financial status
- The “I came from nothing and worked my way up” story does not impress the French and indeed they may question why you would want to speak of such “humble” beginnings

Tips for Communicating with the French

Knowledge of local history & customs are important

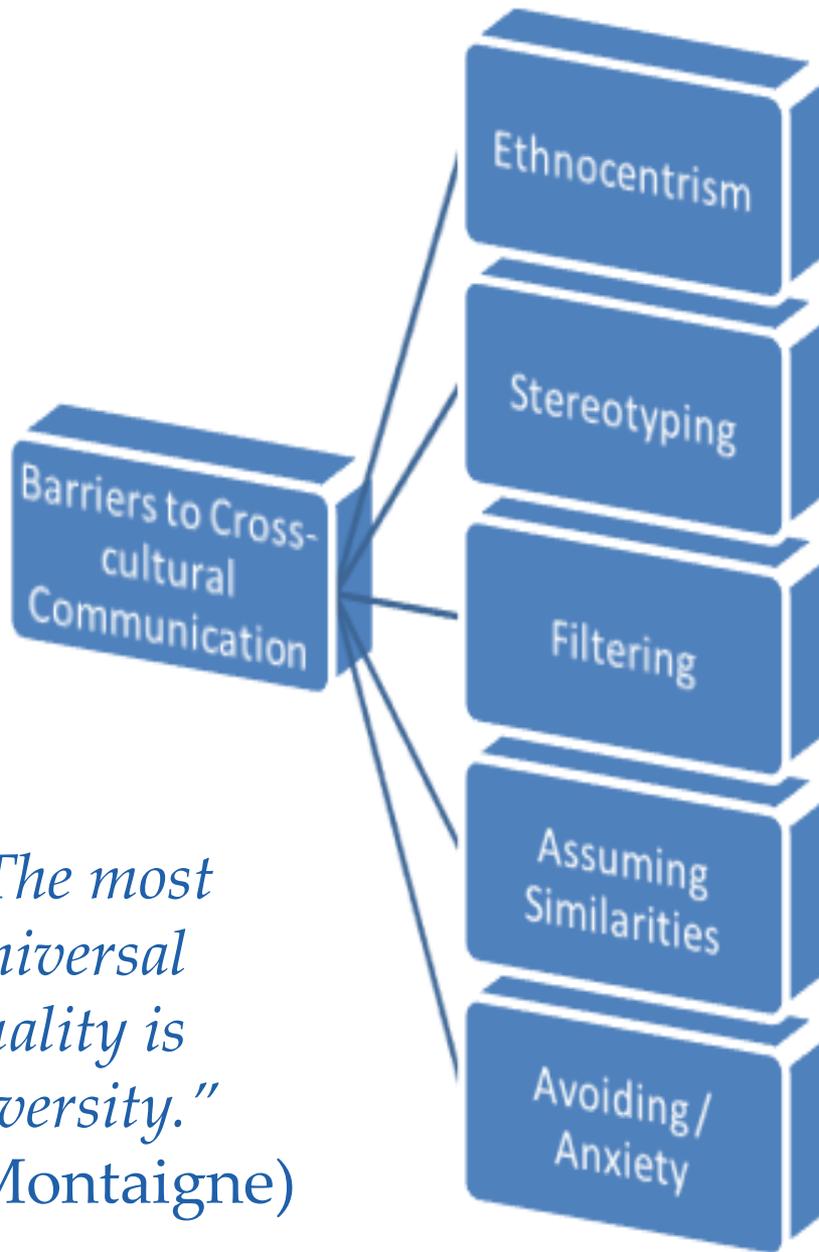
- The French consider themselves worldly and do not observe the “taboos” of politics, religion, and sex as many Americans do
- Be prepared to discuss politics and at least learn a little geography and a bit of history (any criticism of Napoleon is highly discouraged)

Adjust to and respect visual cues

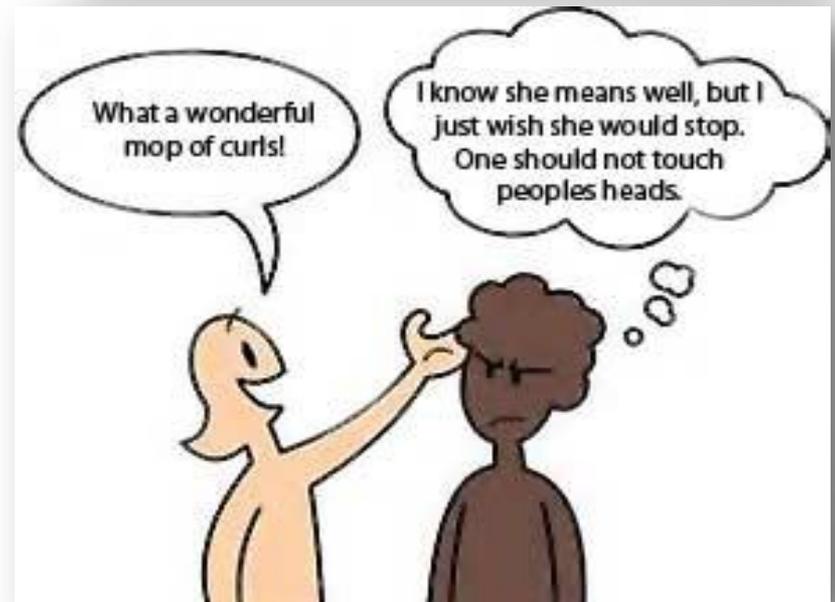
- Maintain direct eye contact while speaking to an individual
- Good posture (hands out of pockets wrists on the table)
- Gum chewing, snapping fingers, and slapping your palm with your fist are considered vulgar

Eye contact and smiling

- The French typically will not make eye contact or greet a stranger on the street as they value their personal space. They also do not smile frequently, as they believe smiling should take place only when there is a supporting reason to do so.
- The French are reserved in their use of facial expressions in general. Do not interpret this as rudeness.



“The most universal quality is diversity.”
(Montaigne)



*Merci
à bientôt*



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