Assessing Your Own Cultural Orientation

Low- and High-Context Assessment

Directions: Read each statement and determine to what degree you agree with the statement on a scale of 1 to 5. Put your number in the blank to the left of the statement:

1= You strongly disagree
2= You generally disagree
3= You are somewhat neutral
4= You generally agree
5= You strongly agree

_____ 1. I typically find myself much more preoccupied with making short-term plans (i.e., what I'm going to do this weekend) than long-term ones (i.e., what I'm planning on doing or being in several years). [reverse]

_____ 2. In my spare time, I am more likely to be found doing something by myself than with others. [reverse]

_____ 3. I probably feel more comfortable having a clearly defined place that is mine where I can control whom I interact with.

_____ 4. When someone is correcting me, I would rather the person just tell me what he or she doesn't like and not make "suggestions." [reverse]

_____ 5. My natural work style is to finish one thing before moving on to the next. [reverse]

_____ 6. A commitment I have made to others is more likely to supersede one I've made to myself. [reverse]

_____ 7. I feel comfortable talking about subjects like my future, my family, and so on, with most people, even if I have only know them a short while. [reverse]

_____ 8. I prefer having things completely spelled out from the beginning than to start operating without an overview of the situation. [reverse]

_____ 9. I dislike it when things don't go according to plans.

_____ 10. I have several really close friends who are friends for life rather than a lot of friends who come and go in my life.

_____ 11. Beyond knowing my first name, I consider my age, my family status, my profession (or my parent's profession) as private matters reserved for only a few close friends.

_____ 12. I would feel more uncomfortable having a contract that doesn't list every detail pertaining to the agreement than to have some "gray" areas which would require negotiating later on. [reverse]

_____ 13. Changing plans—even at the last minute—is no problem for me.

_____ 14. A fair amount of my spare time is spent phoning or writing friends I don't see often.

_____ 15. Having a hedge or wall around my house would seem too confining to me. [reverse]

_____ 16. It is usually better to call "a spade a spade" (be direct) than to hide a situation's "true colors" (be indirect). [reverse]

_____ 17. It bothers me when I am later to appointments. (reverse)

_____ 18. If I had some significant problems I needed help solving, I have any number of friends I could easily turn to for help.

_____ 19. Those I term my "best friends" know just about everything about me and I would never have a problem telling them things that are very very personal.

_____ 20. If my boss or teacher were wrong, I would be more likely to tell her or him than to simply suggest there might be another answer. [reverse]

Scoring directions: Add up your points according to the categories listed (Time Dimension, Relationships Dimension, etc.). If it indicates to reverse—to score the item, do the following:

If you put 1 for that question, score it 5.
If you put 2 for that question, score it 4.
If you put 3 for that question, do not change the score.
If you put 4 for that question, score it 2.
If you put 5 for that question, score it 1.

Time Dimension: 1, 5, 9, 13, 17 (25 points possible)
Relationships Dimension: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18 (25 points possible)
Space Dimension: 3, 7, 11, 15, 19 (25 points possible)
Communication Dimension: 4, 8, 12, 16, 20 (25 points possible)

Add up the points for each dimension individually. Then total the subtotal scores you developed from the individual dimensions to arrive at a total score to indicate your overall cultural tendency.

Interpretation of Scores

1. For each subdimension, the total number of points possible is 25. Although it is difficult to develop absolute cut-off values and interpret those values with complete confidence, the following provides a guide:

    20-25: high
    15-19: medium
    10-14: low

    Time Dimension—the lower the score, the more you tend to be preoccupied with time, sequential in your process, and generally shorter-term in perspective. The higher the score, the less you are preoccupied with time, the more parallel processing you do, and the longer-term perspective you have.

    Relationship Dimension—the higher the score, the more relationships hold a central place in your life. You spend more time developing them and maintaining them than others do. The lower the score, the more tasks usually claim a central role and the development and maintenance of relationships are somewhat peripheral. This does not mean you do not value relationships; it simply means relative to other people, you value task accomplishments more than they and therefore your time and energy is not oriented toward relationship as much.

    Space Dimension—the lower the score, the more open you are emotionally/psychologically, and therefore the more open with physical boundaries as well. Information about you that others might consider private, you can divulge fairly comfortably. You also are physically more accessible to strangers in that you might allow them into your home or give them a lift if hitchhiking more easily than others. In essence your "personal" space is more open; you are more approachable by more people with varying ranges of familiarity.

    Communication Dimension—the lower the score, the more explicit (direct and specific) you are and you like others to be toward you. You dislike having to wonder what people mean by their indirect statements and you would likely push them to be more specific.

2. For a total score and its interpretation, add up the scores for each dimension.

    If you scored: 80-100: You are a high-context person
                      60-79: You are a medium-context person
                      40-59: You are a low-context person

    Simply put, a low-context person is mostly driven by tasks and their accomplishment, generally views the development and maintenance of relationships as more of a hindrance, or at least more of a means than an end, and because the "task" is so important, appreciates directness and explicitness. This individual also dislikes hierarchy and sees it as a barrier to communication and knowledge, both or which are necessary to "get things done."

A high-context person, in contrast, places high value on relationships and see them more as ends than means, although they might indeed be valued as part of a network that allows task accomplishments. As a result, much of this individual's time is spent cultivating and maintaining those relationships. Because relationships are so central, maintaining harmony among them is critical; therefore, avoiding direct and explicit statements that might offend someone is typical. When these relationships are developed, a clearer boundary develops between who is "in" your circle and who is not. As a result, those who are not part of your circle are not trusted as much and are exclude from "accessing" you or those in your circle. Hierarchy or other ways of defining and differentiating groups (we-they) are typical with high-context cultures.

*Survey taken from: Gary Oddou & C. Brooklyn Derr. 1999. Managing Internationally: A Personal Journey. Forth Worth: The Dryden Press. Part II, Pages 7-10.

Low- and High-Context Survey Results

Name:

Time Dimension Score: _____

Relationship Dimension Score: _____

Space Dimension Score: _____

Communication Dimension Score: _____

TOTAL SCORE: _____