Objectives

1. Understand 8 cultural dimensions that impact cross-cultural working relationships

2. Identify your own tendencies related to each of these dimensions, as well as the tendencies of those on your team(s)

3. Identify shifts in your style to accommodate others’ expectations, as well as shifts in your expectations to accommodate others’ styles
To get started

- Meet your neighbor

- Share an experience of misunderstanding between yourself and someone from another culture
### Overview: 8 Cultural Distinctions

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Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Using The Culture Map

1. Identify one person of another culture with whom you work

2. As we talk through each cultural distinction, mark:

- ▲ The midpoint of your culture
- ▲ Your own tendency
- ○ The midpoint of the “Other” person’s culture
- ○ Your perception of their own tendency
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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Communicating

![Figure 1.1](image)

**Low-Context**
Good communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.

**High-Context**
Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*  
Figure 1.1
**Bridging the Gap: Communicating**

- **From a Low-Context culture:**
  - Don’t assume the message is contained in spoken words
  - Pay as much attention to what is not said as to what is said

- **From a High-Context culture:**
  - Don’t assume the message extends beyond spoken words
  - Be especially careful when working with other high-context cultures...contextual cues differ across cultures
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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Persuading

Applications-first

Individuals are trained to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and later add concepts to back up or explain the conclusion as necessary. The preference is to begin a message or report with an executive summary or bullet points. Discussions are approached in a practical, concrete manner. Theoretical or philosophical discussions are avoided in a business environment.

Principles-first

Individuals have been trained to first develop the theory or complex concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. The preference is to begin a message or report by building up a theoretical argument before moving on to a conclusion. The conceptual principles underlying each situation are valued.

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*  
Figure
Persuading in a **Principles-First** culture:
- Do your homework; the fact that something is a ‘best practice’ for a handful of organizations will not be a convincing case
- Explain underlying principles first

Persuading in an **Applications-First** culture:
- Reflect on and identify, “For the purpose of what?” am I sharing this concept?
- Provide an application or case study at the start

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figure 3.1
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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Trusting

Task-based

Trust is built through business-related activities. Work relationships are built and dropped easily, based on the practicality of the situation. You do good work consistently, you are reliable, I enjoy working with you, I trust you.

Relationship-based

Trust is built through sharing meals, evening drinks, and visits at the coffee machine. Work relationships build up slowly over the long term. I’ve seen who you are at a deep level, I’ve shared personal time with you, I know others well who trust you, I trust you.

Source: Erin Meyer, The Culture Map
Figure 6.1
• Building trust in a **Task-Based** culture:
  • Follow through on commitments
  • Report out on your accomplishments
  • Don’t assume a friendly conversation is indicative of a deep relationship
  • Don’t discount the importance of relationships…they are will critical

• Building trust in a **Relationship-Based** culture:
  • Show up as your true, integrated self
  • Don’t “get down to business” until a caring connection is established
  • Offer explanations when asking for details
  • Don’t assume a “hard shell” doesn’t have a soft center
  • Build on common interests
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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Evaluating

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figure 2.2
Context – Feedback Intersection

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figure 2.3
Bridging the Gap: Evaluating

In a **Direct, Low Context Culture**:
- Drop the downgraders
- Don’t try to mimic the direct negative feedback unless you’re also from a direct negative culture

In an **Indirect, Low Context culture**:
- Start with the positive feedback
- Balance positive and negative feedback
- Use “downgraders” (e.g., a little, kind of, somewhat)

In a **Direct, High Context Culture**:
- Drop the downgraders…maybe use a few upgraders
- Don’t take criticism personally
- Recognize that this approach makes positive feedback more meaningful

In an **Indirect, High Context culture**:
- Never give feedback in public
- Give negative feedback over time
- Share positive feedback only, without mentioning anything about areas for improvement
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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Disagreeing

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*  
Figure 7.1
• In a **Confrontational** culture:
  • Don’t assume that disagreement with an idea means disapproval of you
  • View disagreement as an indication of interest in a topic
  • Distinguish emotional expressiveness from confrontation – speaking with passion is not the same as disagreeing
  • Don’t mimic a confrontational style

• In a **Avoids Conflict** culture:
  • Connect with team members prior to meetings so that disagreement can be expressed 1-on-1
  • Use multiple downgraders… *(Maybe, perhaps, I don’t know, what do you think?)*
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**The Culture Map**  
Source: Erin Meyer
Deciding

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figure 5.3
Deciding, continued

Top-Down: “little d”

Consensual: “big D”

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figures 5.1 & 5.2
**Bridging the Gap:**

Deciding

- **In a Consensual culture:**
  - Plan for more time up front
  - Be patient! And focus on how much more efficient the implementation will be when key stakeholders are in alignment
  - Stay in touch with decision-makers, but don’t push for a quick decision

- **In a Top-Down culture:**
  - Don’t expect to be asked for your input
  - Be explicit about how a decision will be made (e.g., consultation, majority rules, etc.)
  - Be flexible and don’t view decisions as final
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is low. The best boss is a facilitator among equals. Organizational structures are flat. Communication often skips hierarchical lines.

The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is high. The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. Status is important. Organizational structures are multilayered and fixed. Communication follows set hierarchical lines.

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map* Figures 4.1
Bridging the Gap: Leading

- **In an Egalitarian culture:**
  - It’s okay to coordinate action, and even to express disagreement, with those who aren’t at your level in the organization.
  - In email, don’t copy the boss unless it’s clear to the recipient why you are doing so.
  - Meetings are attended by key stakeholders, regardless of level.
  - Don’t assume that seating represents a hierarchy.

- **In a Hierarchical culture:**
  - Learn the hierarchy and use it to guide actions, such as greeting others and seating arrangements.
  - Coordinate action with your peer level of leadership, or at least keep that person informed.
  - Your team will need your approval prior to taking action, and will defer to your opinion.
  - Address those at higher levels by their last name, unless they have established a 1st-name basis with you; allow your team to follow custom.
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### Persuading
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### Scheduling
- **Linear time**
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**The Culture Map**

Source: Erin Meyer
Scheduling

Linear-time
Project steps are approached in a sequential fashion, completing one task before beginning the next. One thing at a time. No interruptions. The focus is on the deadline and sticking to the schedule. Emphasis is on promptness and good organization over flexibility.

Flexible-time
Project steps are approached in a fluid manner, changing tasks as opportunities arise. Many things are dealt with at once and interruptions accepted. The focus is on adaptability, and flexibility is valued over organization.

Source: Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*
Figures 8.1
• **In a Linear-Time culture:**
  • Arrive on time and end on time
  • If you are to be late, keep other informed of your arrival time so they can plan accordingly
  • Use an agenda; if an issue is raised that is not on the agenda, don’t assume that everyone is willing to discuss it at that meeting

• **In a Flexible-Time culture:**
  • Put relationships before timeliness
  • Use an open agenda, and be willing to entertain topics that aren’t on your agenda
  • If you really need others to arrive on time and/or if you really need to end on time, make this explicit and/or make a game of it
The Culture Map
Source: Erin Meyer

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What differences have you experienced?

• Regroup with your neighbor

• Revisit your examples from your prior conversation (an experience of misunderstanding between yourself and someone from another culture) through the lens of the cross-cultural differences just discussed

Discuss:

♦ How does *The Culture Map* contribute to your understanding of the misunderstanding?
♦ What are one or two things that you can do differently to “bridge the gaps” in this relationship?
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