Erin Meyer's 8 Scales for Visualizing Culture

By Megumi Taoka

1. Communicating: Low-context vs. High-context
- Low-context: Communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value.
- High-context: Communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines.

2. Evaluating: Direct feedback vs. Indirect feedback
- Direct feedback: Negative feedback is provided frankly, bluntly, and honestly without being softened by positive feedback.
- Indirect feedback: Negative feedback is provided softly, subtly, and diplomatically while given within positive feedback.

3. Persuading: Applications-first vs. Principles-first
- Application-first: Individuals are trained to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion before adding concepts to back up or explain the conclusion as necessary.
- Principle-first: Individuals are trained to first develop the theory or complex concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion.

4. Leading: Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical
- Egalitarian: The best boss is a facilitator among equals. Organizational structure is flat.
- Hierarchical: The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. Organizational structure is multilayered and fixed.

5. Deciding: Consensual vs. Top-down
- Consensual: Decisions are made in groups through unanimous agreement.
- Top-down: Decisions are made by individuals (usually the boss).

6. Trusting: Task-based vs. Relationship-based
- Task-based: "You do good work consistently" means "You are reliable." "I enjoy working with you" means "I trust you."
- Relationship-based: "I've seen who you are at a deep level, I've shared personal time with you over meals and drinks, and I know others well who trust you" means "I trust you."

7. Disagreeing: Confrontational vs. Avoid confrontation

- Confrontational: Disagreement and debate are positive for the team or organization. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively impact the relationship.
- Avoids confrontation: Disagreement and debate are negative for the team or organization. Open conflict is inappropriate and will break group harmony or negatively impact the relationship.

8. Scheduling: Linear-time vs. Flexible-time

- Linear-time: Focus is on the deadline and sticking to the schedule. Emphasis is on promptness and good organization.
- Flexible-time: Tasks can be changed as opportunities arise. Many things can be dealt with at once, and interruptions are acceptable.

The Culture Map, by Erin Meyer
The Culture Map explains how these eight scales apply to each country and in which context, allowing you to roughly benchmark your country's position or corporate culture relative to others when doing business. In doing so, you equip yourself with stronger cross-cultural management tools.

It goes without saying, of course, that there are **always** individual differences from person to person, so these benchmarks shouldn't be taken as universal.

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