



MASTERING
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Bridging Cultural Gaps for Better Workplace Connections

SCORE Los Angeles



Luiza Dreasher

Brazilian by Birth, Multicultural by Choice



My Life's Passion:

Helping individuals understand and work well across differences



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This Webinar Is For You If...



- You work with a culturally diverse team, and you want to **enhance communication across cultural boundaries**.
- You are looking to **build deeper trust and connection** across differences.
- You're ready to **embed cultural awareness** into your daily interactions.
- Or you simply want **to learn some important cultural differences** and how they are impacting your workplace.



LET'S
DO
THIS

Eliminate Distractions



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Four Common Mistakes That Undermine Genuine Cross-Cultural Connection—And How to Avoid Them



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Mistake 1

Approaching the conversation with a “we are all humans mentality.”

Keep in Mind

When working with culturally diverse employees or colleagues, you need to understand that the **same action** can have different meanings in different situations.



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Mistake 2

Assuming that the use of a common language (i.e., English) is enough to guarantee understanding.



Jargons Commonly Used in English

- Out of left field
- Ballpark figure
- Curveball



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Brazilian Slang

***The cow went to the
swamp.
(A vaca foi pro brejo.)***

Keep in Mind

Just because you are using a common language, it does not mean individuals are understanding you.

Remember to

- Avoid the use of jargon or ritualistic phrases
- Use common language
- Check for understanding frequently

Mistake 3

Failure to Go Beyond the Spoken Word



The majority of what we communicate is done through nonverbal channels, and researchers agree that nonverbal communication carries **far more weight** than verbal communication.



- Nonverbal communication can become especially problematic in situations where more than one culture is involved.
- That is because, regardless of what you are intending to communicate, your behavior can be interpreted differently.
- The potential for misunderstandings or for you to offend is high.

Keep in Mind

- The spoken language is just one aspect you need to consider.
- You also need to pay attention to observable nonverbal signs and symbols such as gestures, postures, facial expressions and other body movements.
- **Never assume the same non-verbal gesture will have the same meaning across cultures.**




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Mistake 4


Failure to recognize our tendency to make assumptions about others.





Direct Communicators (USA) Perceive **Indirect Communicators** (Asians) As:

- Vague
- Ambiguous
- Evasive
- Wishy-washy



Indirect Communicators (Asians) Perceive **Direct Communicators** (USA) As:

- Impolite
- Socially unskilled
- Disrespectful
- Inconsiderate

Keep in Mind

- Of our tendency to make assumptions about “the other.”
- These assumptions are made from our own, ethnocentric perspective, which prevents us from seeing things from the perspective of the other.

The Four Mistakes to Avoid

1. *Approaching the conversation with the “we are all humans mentality.”*
2. *Failure to recognize that the use of a common language does not guarantee understanding.*
3. *Failure to go beyond the spoken word.*
4. *Failure to recognize our tendency to evaluate “the other.”*



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Principles to Keep in Mind

For More Effective Cross-Cultural
Engagement





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Always Look Deeper

Principle 1





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Culture

The Software of the
Mind

Culture

- Collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members from one group from others.
- Learned, not innate.
- Shared.
- Always changing and evolving.
- Individuals' behaviors are only **partially predetermined** by their mental programming or culture.



Culture as an Iceberg

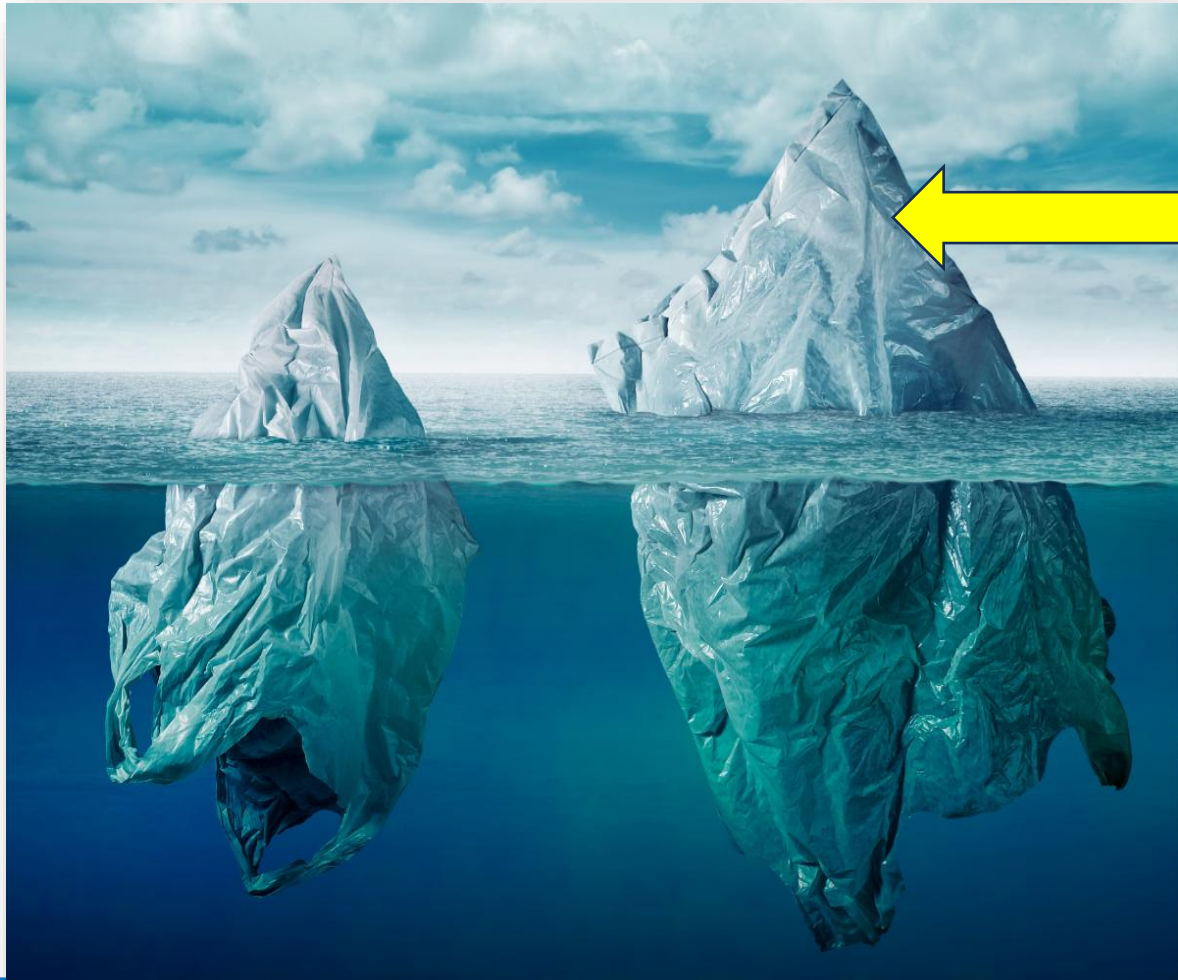


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Above the water line aspects
of culture

Deep surface aspects of
culture

Above the Water Aspects of Culture

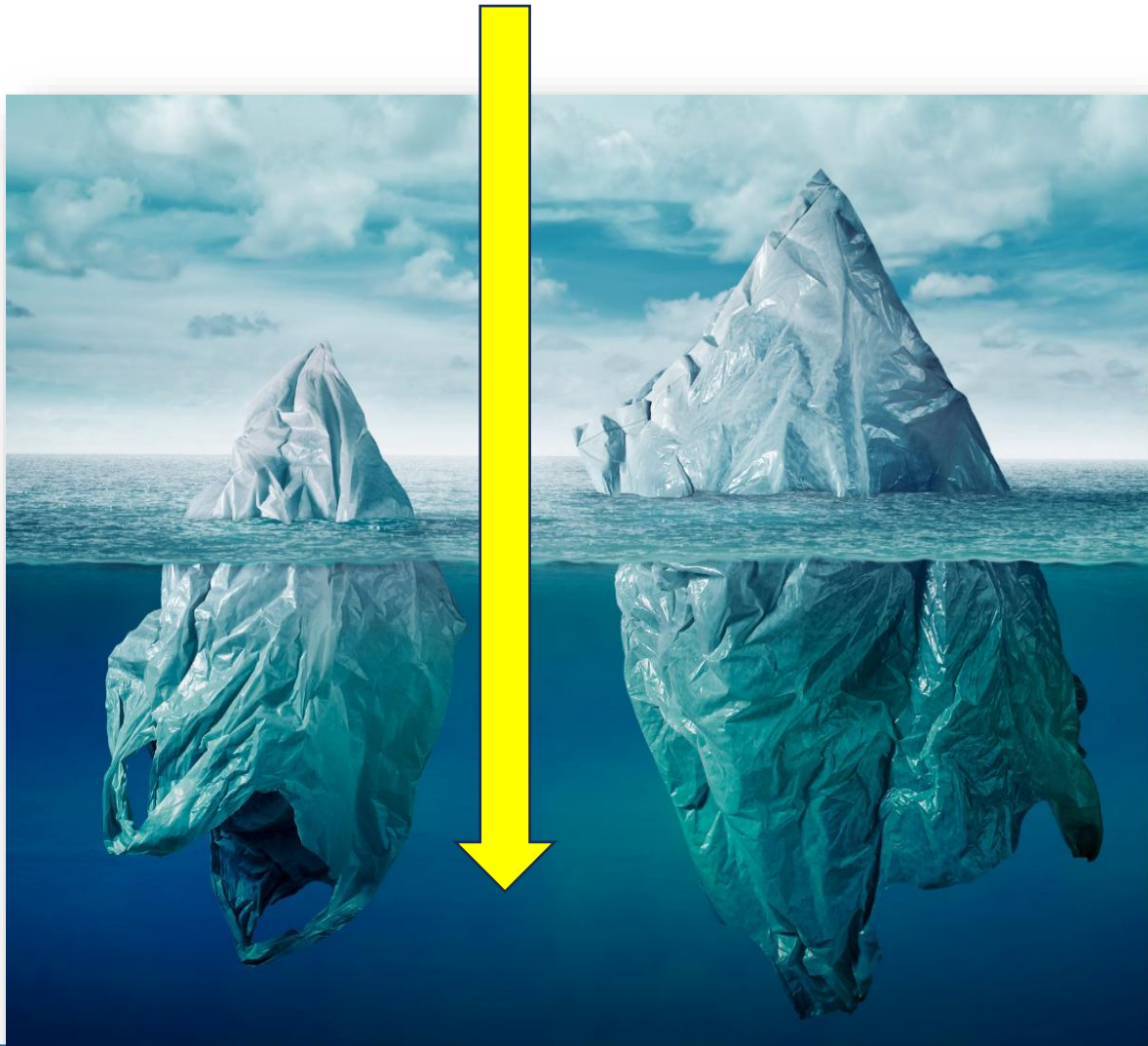


- Behaviors and anything else you can **perceive with your five senses.**
- Clothing | Gestures | Patterns of Eye contact | Sports | Local Music | The Food

Below the Water Aspects of Culture



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- Aspects you cannot easily perceive with your five senses.
- The foundation for what you see at the top.
- It takes time for you to understand what is below the surface.
- Explains, to a certain extent, why people behave the way they do.
- Example: ***Dinner party***

Keep in Mind...



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- Neither of the two parts of the iceberg should be ignored.
- Misunderstandings usually occur because of something that is happening below the surface that you don't understand.
- **When you understand cultural differences, you are better able to anticipate how individuals may act or react in various situations. It also allows you to shift your behavior accordingly.**

Implications For the Cross-Cultural Workplace



- Understanding your employee's deep culture is key.
- It will help you recognize the underlying causes of why they behave the way they do and if culture has anything to do with it.
 - For example, why isn't the individual maintaining eye contact? Are they shy, are they lying, or are they showing respect?
- When you understand cultural differences, you are better equipped to anticipate how your employees will act or react in a variety of situations.

The Meaning of Effective Communication Varies a Great Deal Between Cultures

Principle 2

Exchange Between Two Japanese Women

Mrs. Kurogi:

Hello, Mrs. Yamashita...Your son Toji is entering his high school karaoke contest, isn't he? I envy you, because you must be so proud of his talent. You must be looking forward to his future as a pop singer...I am really impressed by his enthusiasm – every day, he practices so hard, for hours and hours, until late at night...

Exchange Between Two Japanese Women

Mrs. Yamashita:

Oh, I'm so sorry...Toji is just a beginner in karaoke singing. We don't know his future yet...He is such a silly boy singing so late. We didn't realize you can hear all the noise next door. I will tell him to stop right away. I am so sorry for all your trouble. It won't happen again.



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Low-Context Communicators

- Intention or meaning is best expressed through explicit verbal messages.
- Preference for direct verbal mode (straight talk).
- The **speaker** is responsible for constructing a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily.

High Context Communicators



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- Intention or meaning is best conveyed through the context (e.g., social roles, status, or positions) and through nonverbal channels (e.g., pauses, silence, tone of voice).
- Preference for indirect talk.
- Prefer a roundabout way of expression.
- The **receiver** assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meanings of the message, to “read between the lines”, and decode the nonverbal subtleties that accompany the verbal message.

Implications For the Cross-Cultural Workplace



- In our increasingly multicultural society or when working with diverse employees, it will pay handsomely to understand the role of context in your conversations.
- When working with high-context employees, remember to read “between the lines” and decode the nonverbal subtleties that are, no doubt, accompanying their verbal messages.
- You will have to coach your high-context employees, so they will feel more comfortable expressing their intentions through explicit and direct verbal messages.



Saying “No” Is Not Always
Appropriate

Principle 3

An Example

Researchers Martin and Nakayama shared:

*An individual from Tunisia had been in the United States for several months before he realized that if he was asked directions and didn't know the location of the place, he should tell the truth instead of devising a response. He explained that he had been taught that it was better to engage in conversation, to give a person some response, than to disappoint the person by revealing that he **didn't know**.*

Implications For the Cross-Cultural Workplace

- Keep in mind the tendency of some groups to “soften the negative.”
- Understand that responses such as *maybe*, *perhaps*, *it’s difficult*, or *I will consider it*, actually mean “no” for some of them.
- Never put your employee in a position to say “no” to you.
- **More effective strategy:** Don’t ask “yes” or “no” questions. Provide your employee with options so they can reject what they do not want without feeling they have offended you or disrupted the harmony of the employee/manager relationship.
- **Your employees see you as an authority figure. If they employ this method, it is because they fear they will be seen as rude or disrespectful if they say “no” to you.**



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**Embarrassment
Must Be Avoided at
All Costs by “Saving
Face”**

Principle 4



Where “Face” is **Less Important** (USA, UK, Germany, France, Russia)



- Telling the truth is more important than sparing someone’s feelings.
- Honesty is the best policy.
- It’s OK to say “no” and to disagree with people.
- Receiving/giving information efficiently is the primary goal of the communication exchange.

Where “Face” is **More Important**

(Japan, China, Middle East)

- Preserving harmony in the relationship is a key concern.
- The truth, if it threatens harmony or someone’s face, should be adjusted.
- Individuals will say what the other person wants to hear.
- It’s not always proper to say “no,” disagree, or argue (that disturbs harmony).
- Preserving/strengthening the relationship is the goal of the communication exchange.

Implications For the Cross-Cultural Workplace



- The desire to save face is manifested in a number of behaviors—each reflecting a different concern. For example:
 - Employees may be reluctant to ask questions or tell you they did not understand for fear of appearing ignorant.
 - Or they may not do as expected for fear of performing the task incorrectly, which could lead to embarrassment.
- For these individuals, the truth may be adjusted for the sake of preserving the relationship.

The key: Recognize these behaviors for what they are -- a possible cultural difference -- so you can help your employees adjust their behavior accordingly.

Final Thoughts

- The success of a culturally diverse team will require navigating through wildly different cultural realities. You need to understand cultural differences to avoid misunderstandings, needless conflict, and possible failure.
- It is a big mistake to go in assuming that focusing on individual differences and not on cultural differences is enough. If you go into an interaction assuming that culture doesn't matter, “your default mechanism” is to view individuals through your own cultural lens.

Final Thoughts (cont'd)

- When interacting with someone from another culture, watch more, listen more, and speak less.
- Explain your own style frequently.
- Above all, learn to lead in different ways so you can mobilize and motivate your employees who have a different cultural orientation.



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Dr. Luiza Dreasher

Founder and CEO

Mastering Cultural Differences

Training Solutions for Culturally Diverse
Organizations

💬 *(she/her/hers)*



www.masteringculturaldifferences.com



luiza@masteringculturaldifferences.com



[luiza-dreasher-phd](https://www.linkedin.com/in/luiza-dreasher-phd)



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Biggest Takeaway

Q/A