Understanding the Germans

An Introduction to Intercultural Awareness
First Impressions

What were your first impressions?
What did you expect?
What surprised you?
What shocked you?
Typically German?
Culture

Culture is the Software of the Mind

(Arerd Hofstede, Dutch Psychologist)

Culture is an *orientation system* for a nation, society, organization or group. It is passed on from generation to generation. It influences perception, thinking, values and actions of all the group members and defines their membership to this group. Culture is a *sub-conscious, action-influencing system of values and norms* which is acquired during socialization and is shared by all members of a society and passed on to its new members.

(Alexander Thomas, German Psychologist)
The Iceberg Model

- food
- language
- gestures/
- clothing
- facial expressions
- norms
- religion
- hierarchy
- family
- managing time
- handling emotions
- concept of self
- motivation
- relationships
Cultural Dimensions

- Proxemics (personal space)
- Time (monochronic or polychronic understanding of time)
- Communication (high context vs low context)

  (E.T. Hall, US American Anthropologist)

- Individualism vs Collectivism

  (Geerh Hofstede, Dutch Psychologist)
Proxemics

- Personal space

- Ok

- Not Ok
Proxemics in Germany

Social space: from 1.2m to 3.6m
  Separation from strangers, salespeople, workers or office staff

Personal space: between 60 cm and 1m
  For good friends or colleagues

Intimate space: less than 60 cm separation
  Closest friends, family members or partner
  Body contact allowed
Time

- How many clocks can be found in public space
- How late/early can you be, if at all
- How far in advance do you plan
- Monochronic or Polychronic understanding of time
Time

Monochronic
• time is limited and must be used wisely
• plans and schedules must be kept strictly
→ one task after another, extensive planning

Polychronic
• there is enough time for everything, time can be used at will
• a person does not need to subject itself to plans and schedules
→ multiple tasks at the same time, high flexibility
Perception of Time in Germany

- **Monochronic**: time is valuable in itself (spend/save/waste time)
- Structured day: ideal use of time
- Punctuality = respect
- Deadlines are non-negotiable, opening hours are strictly adhered to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONO chronic</th>
<th>POLY chronic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Central &amp; South America, large parts of Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
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<td>Russia, Arab Countries</td>
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<td>India, Southern &amp; Eastern Europe</td>
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<td>UK, NZ, AUS, North America</td>
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<td>Scandinavia, Northern &amp; Central Europe</td>
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High Context and Low Context Communication

**High Context Communication**
Primary purpose of communication is to form and develop relationships; contextual information is needed

**Low Context Communication**
Primary purpose of communication is the exchange of information, facts and opinions
High Context and Low Context Communication

High Context vs Low Context Cultures

High Context

Asia
Arab Countries
Central/South America

Mediterranean Countries
Eastern Europe

Britain, NZ, AUS
North America

Low Context

Scandinavia
Switzerland
Germany
Communication in Germany

- Task-oriented, is meant for exchanging information
- Direct; no hidden message
- Yes: agreement and commitment
- No: lack of agreement, not rejection of the person
- Don’t be too loud -> Respect others
- Accept any offer immediately
- Small talk is not necessary, you can come directly to the point
<table>
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<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Loosely-knit social framework</td>
<td>• Tightly-knit social framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Individual ownership of resources</td>
<td>• Resources are shared</td>
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<td>• Self-actualization is a high goal <em>(live your dreams/do as you please/know what you want)</em></td>
<td>• Harmony and consensus in society are the ultimate goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Make decisions individually</td>
<td>• Make decisions as a group</td>
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<td>→ Self responsibility</td>
<td>→ Group responsibility</td>
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Individualism in Germany

- Independent personality with own identity, as autonomous as possible
- Having and expressing your own opinion, making your own decisions is very important
- Each person (and **not** the group) is responsible for their own behaviour
- Initiative within a group is valued and indeed expected
- Task is more important than relationship
- Need help? Ask for it!
The German Cultural Standards

Culture standards: the socially shared and accepted norms and values that are used by the individuals living within a particular culture to evaluate the behavior of each other.

- Directness of communication
- Focus on the task
- Value of structures and rules
- Reliability and avoidance of uncertainty (rule-oriented, internalised focus of control)
- Punctuality and time planning
- Separation of private and public spheres

according to Dr. Sylvia Schroll-Machl from Doing Business with Germans. Our Perception – Their Perception.
At University
The University System

- Few distinct levels in hierarchy, but show respect and use titles (Prof./Dr.) unless instructed otherwise
- **Self responsibility**: Each individual must take care of his/her affairs (accommodation, meeting deadlines, etc.)
- Not a typical ‘sit down and listen’ education
- Ideally, the teacher is an expert in his field and also a facilitator who helps you to develop your own ideas
- Education = dialogue of constructive criticism
- Lots of room for discussion, student’s opinion counts
The Culture Shock

- Satisfaction
- Euphoria
- Misunderstandings
- Clash
- Accepting the Differences
- Acculturation

(according to J. Bolten)
The Culture Shock: what helps?

- Admit it and be patient
- Discover your new surroundings and get familiar with them
- Devote time to a hobby in your new surroundings
- Make contact with your colleagues and neighbours and ask them for an “appointment”
- Eat familiar food and cook meals from home (and invite neighbours and colleagues)
Peach or Coconut?
Perspective
Thank you for your attention 😊