

THI

## State of the Art

How to improve intercultural communication?



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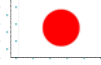








**Introduction to intercultural communication**

**Experiences other companies**

**How information is conveyed and perceived**

**Summery and recommendations to improve intercultural communication**

# An international matrix organisation with German roots

Business unit	South America	Greater China	Germany	IMEA	Asia Pacific	North America
A 						
B 						
C 						
D 						
E 						
F 						
G 						

# Be aware and unveil the hidden aspects of cultural diversity

## Cultural Iceberg Model



**visible culture (perceived)**  
language, customs, habits, dress code,  
music, literature, gestures etc.

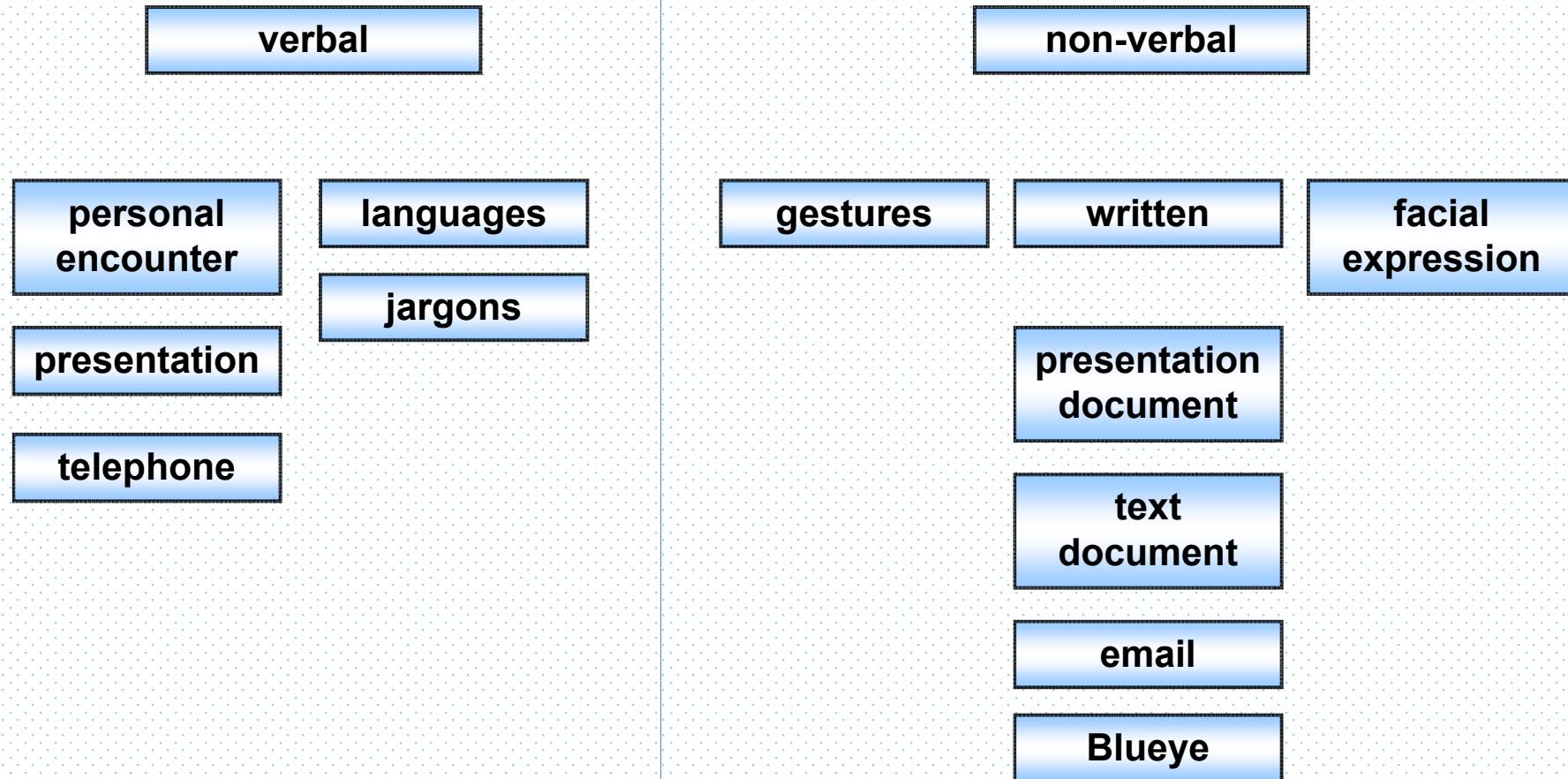
### hidden culture

**norms and values:**

- perception of time, space, justice, power, threats
- approach to conflicts
- emotions, passion, sympathy, antipathy
- idea of logic, friendship, truth, freedom, honour
- importance of work, individualism, justice, wealth

# How do we communicate with each other?

Back-up



# Which cultural elements have a fundamental impact on communication?

Back-up

**Hierarchical thinking**

**Business language**

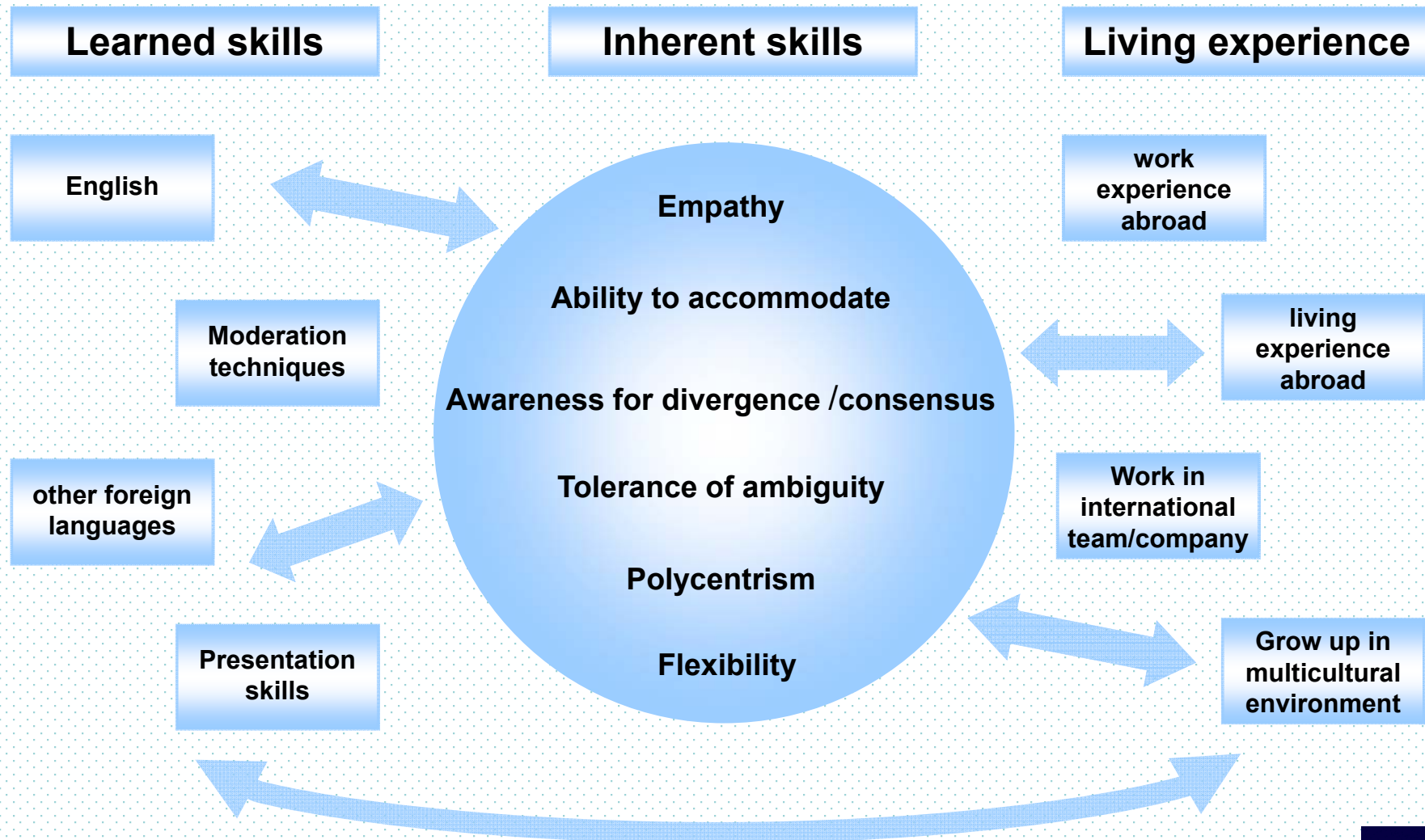
**Communication style**

**Display of emotions**

**Relationship building**

**Conflict management**

# What determines our intercultural competence?



# Culture deeply influences the way we communicate

Form of Communication	Brasil	China	Germany	India	Japan	USA
Appearance / face to face	very informal	formal	formal	formal	reserved	informal
Telephone	talk around	initiation of contact	straight	initiation of contact	talk around	1st small talk/ then straight
Body language	prominent	reserved	reserved	expressive	impassive	friendliness/ expressive
Presentation	interactive / entertaining	to the point	to the point/ fact driven	entertaining / indirect	indirect/ interpretative	interactive/ to the point
Text document	informal / to the point	more positive	to the point	indirect/ extensive	very detailed	structured/ to the point
Email	informal / to the point	short / non-binding	short/formal	extensive/ formal	extremely formal	short/informal/ aware of tone?



## + What works well today?

Building up international relationships works well because general **awareness for cultural divergence** is **given**

International communication works the better the **closer** the **cultures** are

To increasing number of **international workshops & management meetings** established to promote international communication and exchange of ideas/experiences

Steadily increasing contents of (mostly) multi-lingual internal **communication media** balances well local and international topics and is well received by employees around the globe to enhance knowledge

High **readiness to** make **compromises** when topic is looked at from different angle

## – Where is room for improvement?

At times limited **commandment of English** leads in written communication to misunderstandings/conflicts among non-native speakers

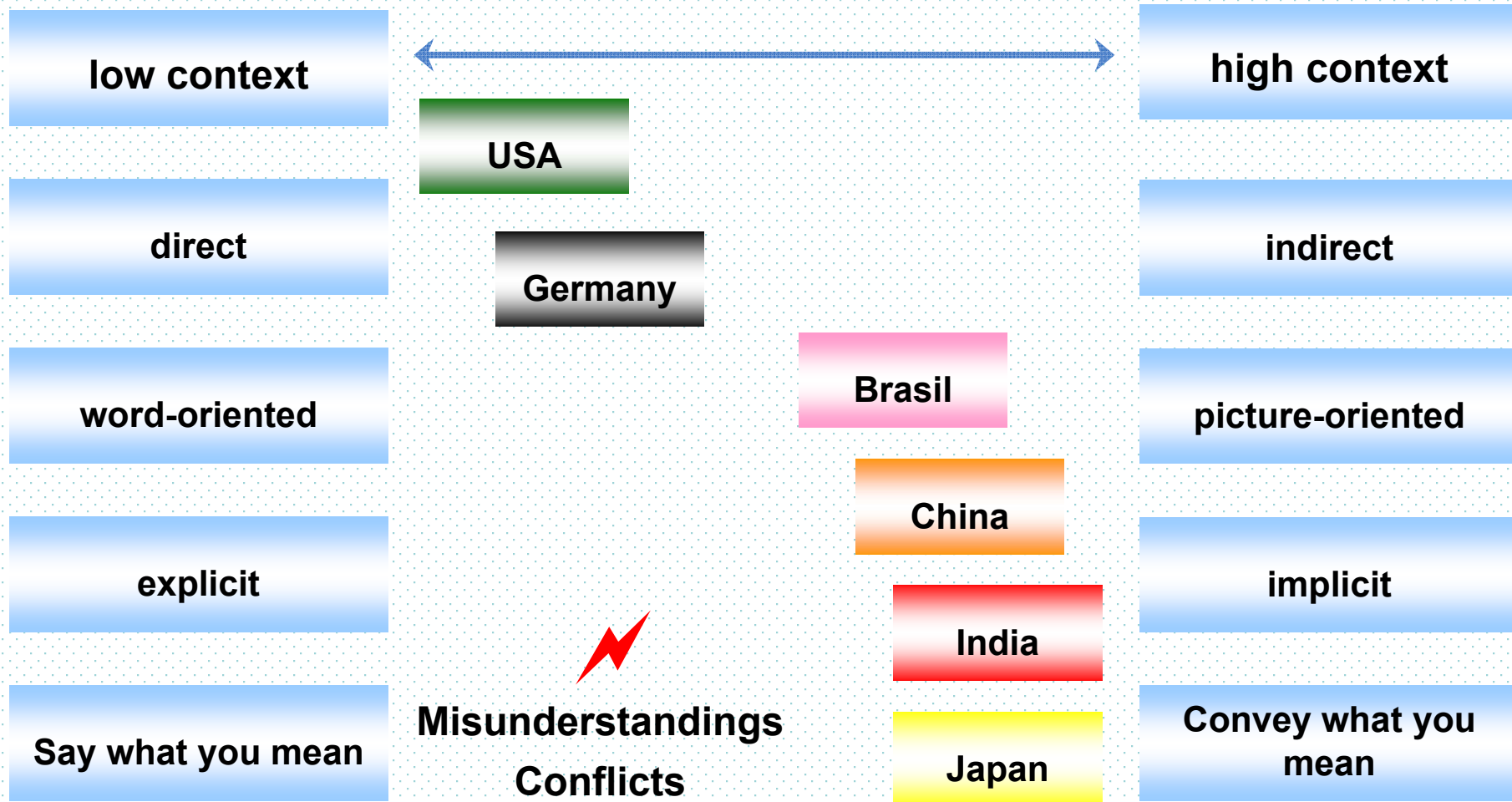
At times leaders of international projects (esp. Germans) miss **awareness for cultural peculiarities** before starting assignments

Often colleagues from subsidiaries outside Germany are hesitant or reluctant to take an **active part in** an international **project** particularly when coming from a high context culture because they expect that head office sets the rules

Often **tedious coordination processes** due to open communication culture

A organization as a whole not yet well prepared to **implement** large international **projects** by proven skill box/methodology

# How do you convey and perceive a message?



# Characteristics of low context communication style in business environment

Back-up

**Written form is important (contracts, minutes, notes)**

**Primary purpose of communication is exchange of business related information**

**Positive criticism: honest, clarifying, lacking emotions**

**Relationships at work are functional and impersonal**

**Short-term expectations more important than long-term relationship & trust**

**Thought patterns are analytical**

**Clear responsibilities, rules, hierarchies and job descriptions**

# Characteristics of high context communication style in business environment

Back-up

**Non-verbal signs and tacit messages are important**

**One knows much about business & private environment of others**

**Conflicts of interest must be settled implicitly before deal can be agreed**

**Trust and good personal (private) knowledge of colleague/business partner essential for successful business relationship**

**It is considered rude to say things clearly**

**Thought patterns are intuitive, holistic and deductive**

**Few explicit rules. Most rules go w/o saying.**

**Idea of contracts/agreements more important than exact compliance**

# Communication aspects in a Corporate culture

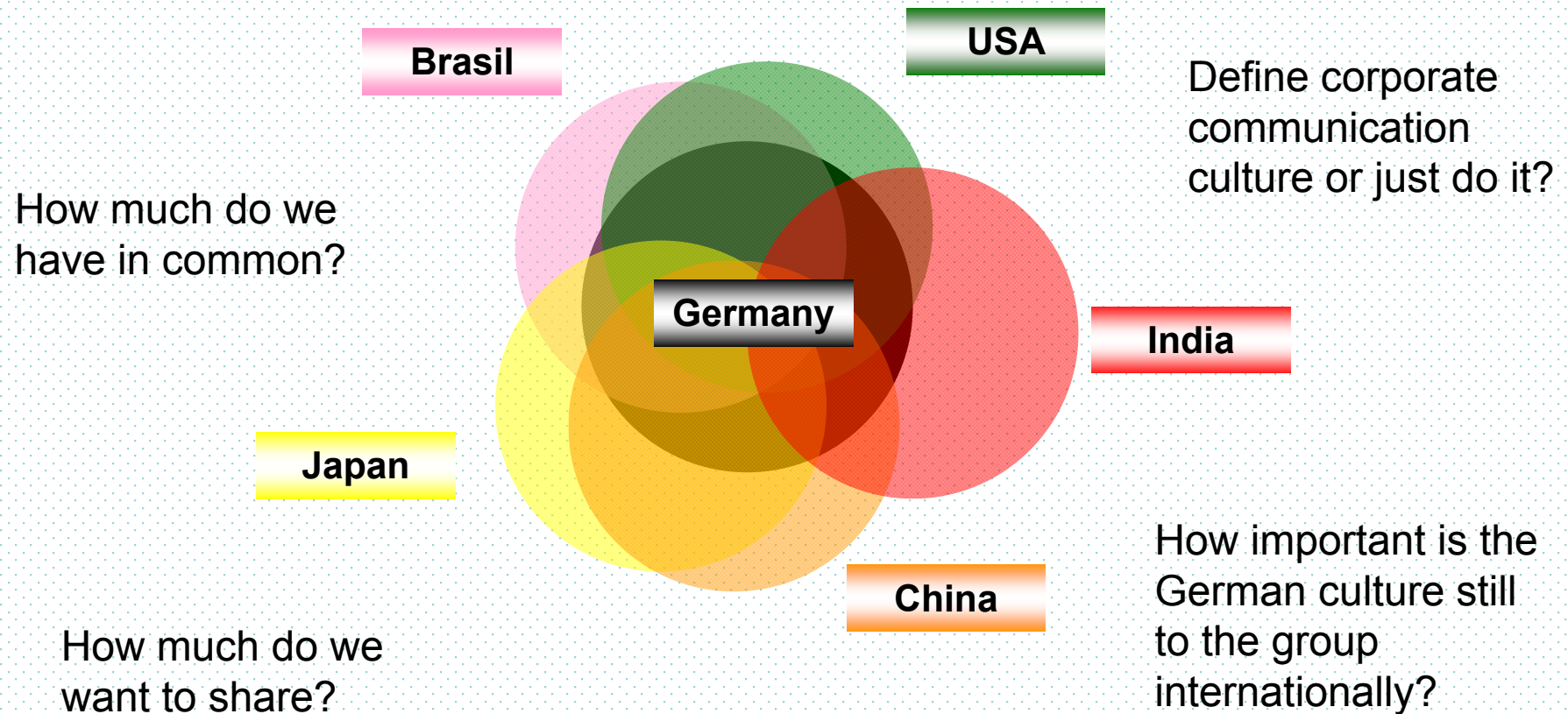
Back-up

Cultural element	Brasil	China	Germany	India	Japan	USA
Hierarchical thinking	mediocre importance	high importance	mediocre importance	high importance	high importance	little importance
Communication style	proximity touching eye contact	handshake no touching eye contact	handshake no touching eye contact	keep distance no pointing	indirect subtle little gestures	direct first names eye contact
Display of emotions	affectionate hot blooded	happiness not anger/ discontent	articulate discontent & satisfaction	reserved esp. to opposite sex	reserved	express yourself keep limits
Relationship building	socialising important for business	formal on same level eating out	straight forward	take time socialising important	connection rather than relationship	informal, socialising important
Conflict management	direct & frank	via superior	direct & discreet	conflicts avoided save face	via trusted person	direct & discreet



# Harmonised communication culture or individual approaches?

Back-up



# We get a new manager from Germany. What can we do to work as a team?

Back-up

<b>Display of emotions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Express yourself. Do not be shy.</li></ul>
<b>Communication style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Make eye contact, shake hands, keep arm's length distance</li><li>▪ Be efficient: Concise written &amp; verbal communication but maintain form</li></ul>
<b>Hierarchical thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ You are expected to organise your work and take responsibility for it</li><li>▪ Address topic primarily to team member in charge</li><li>▪ Inform team manager about important steps</li></ul>
<b>Conflict management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not be hesitant to address team problems</li><li>▪ Do not be hesitant to criticise your manager but be constructive.</li><li>▪ Approach superior manager or trusted person if direct criticism fails.</li></ul>



# I am the new manager. What can I do that we work as a team?

Back-up

<b>Display of emotions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Avoid extreme &amp; peculiar reactions and anger.</b></li></ul>
<b>Communication style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Be clear but unobtrusive.</b></li><li>▪ <b>Offer first names only where it is customary.</b></li></ul>
<b>Relationship building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Invite team to socialise</b></li><li>▪ <b>Show interest in new ideas, habits, environments but convey subtly when your limits are reached</b></li></ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Communitarian cultures (e.g. Asia):</b> set team goals, incentify team, let team find solution for task, do not reprimand team member in front of others</li><li>▪ <b>Individual cultures (e.g. US):</b> Stick to decision once it is made, motivate each team member by delegating challenging tasks/responsibilities, reward individual success</li></ul>

# Recommendations for intercultural communication (I)

Back-up

Cultural element	Company Group
Display of emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Express yourself but keep to universally acknowledged limits.</li><li>▪ Avoid extreme &amp; peculiar reactions and anger.</li></ul>
Communication style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Make eye contact, shake hands, keep arm's length distance to show respect to colleague/customer</li><li>▪ Be clear but unobtrusive. Do not rush into first names.</li></ul>
Relationship building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Take opportunities to socialise, show interest in colleague/customer</li><li>▪ Set up a connection network in your organisation, as sales person with (potential) customers</li><li>▪ Show interest in new ideas, habits, environments but convey subtly when your limits are reached</li></ul>



# Recommendations for intercultural communication (II)

Back-up

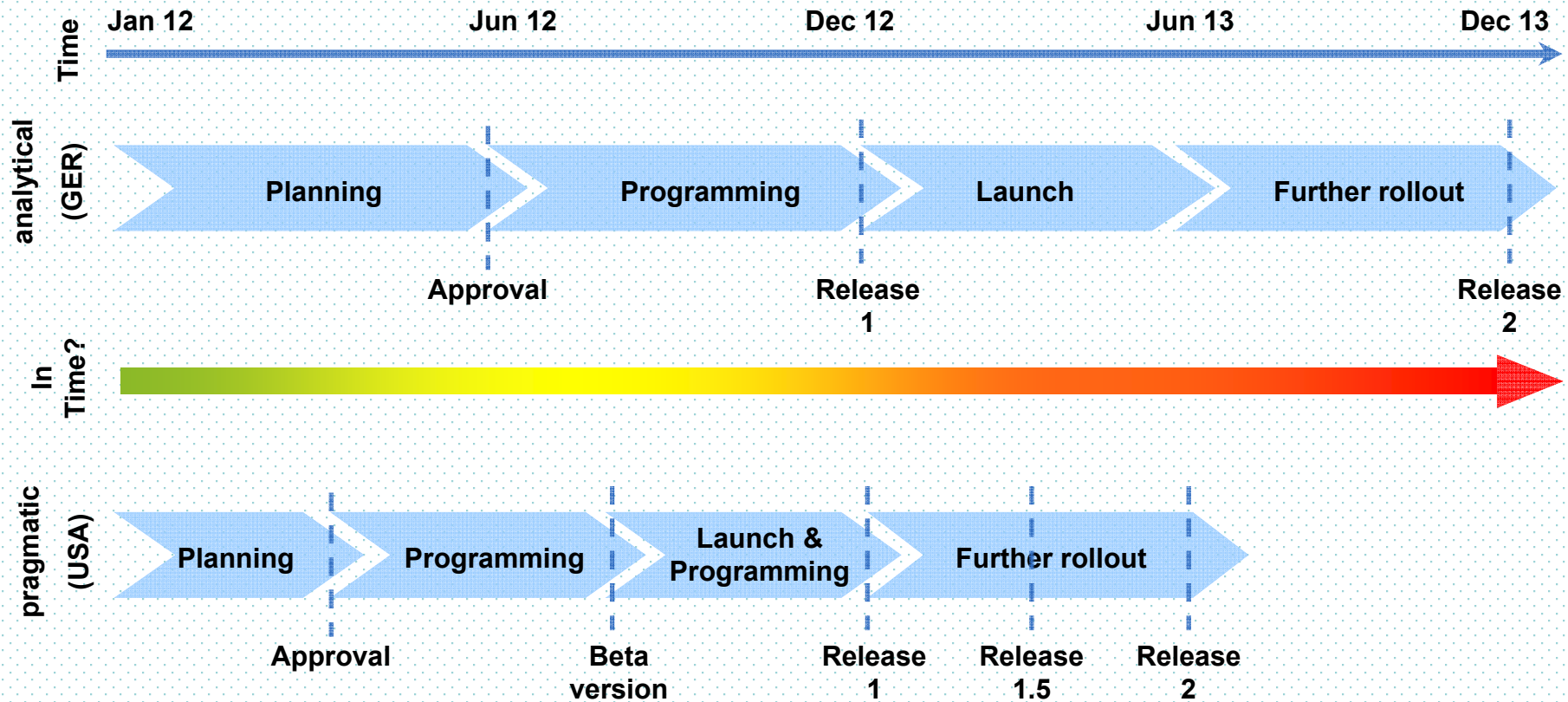
Cultural element	Company Group
Business language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ International approach: 1 corporate language ⇒ English</li><li>▪ Local communication: amongst exclusively native speakers also official language of country</li></ul>
Hierarchical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Address topic primarily to colleague in charge to maintain efficiency</li><li>▪ Inform his/her superior and others as you deem appropriate but avoid mass communication</li></ul>
Conflict management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Articulate recognition, satisfaction and discontent.</li><li>▪ Do not be hesitant to criticise but be constructive and discreet.</li><li>▪ Approach superior manager or trusted person if direct criticism fails.</li></ul>

# Recommendation to develop intercultural competence

Skill / Experience	technician	International project manager	Management
Work/living experience abroad			
Work in international teams/company			
Ability to accommodate			
Interest in foreign culture			
Awareness for cultural divergence			
English			

*increase with responsibility*

# Recommendation for project management: Make use of best cultural approach



Find right balance between time to market and high quality solution

## Recommendation: Promote intercultural exchange

Give business experts and young managers more opportunities to acquire intercultural communication skills on **practical assignments abroad** for a duration of at least 2 months.

Assignment allows candidate and management to better evaluate his/her capabilities as potential leader and to improve the candidate's **preparation for future management assignment**

Develop an international **trainee programme** for graduates featuring 1 or 2 assignments abroad for a duration of 3 to 6 months.

Allow for **greater cultural diversity** on all levels of responsibility in **Germany** (particularly in corporate and Management staff)

# Thank you very much for your attention!

## TH International GmbH Consulting & Support

Thomas Hinrichsen, CEO  
Ettighofferstraße 78  
D-53123 Bonn  
Germany  
[www.thi-cs.de](http://www.thi-cs.de)  
[support@thi-cs.de](mailto:support@thi-cs.de)