CULTURAL SCALES

Many of us underestimate how differently people do things in other countries.

These cultural scales (first produced by Erin Meyer in "The Culture Map") can help us to understand the complexities of international communication.

DISAGREEING

Israel Germany Denmark Australia USA   Sweden India China   Indonesia

France Russia Spain Italy   UK   Brazil Mexico Kenya Ghana   Japan

Netherlands   Singapore Saudi Arabia   Thailand

Confrontational ←——————————————————————————→ **Avoids confrontation**

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

Disagreeing:

Some cultures embrace confrontation while others avoid it. This scale looks a lot like the scale showing the directness of negative feedback, though with some differences, such as Sweden being further to the left (direct) on negative feedback and further to the right (avoiding confrontation) on disagreeing.

SAY
WHAT?

PERSUADING

Italy   Russia Germany   Argentina   Sweden   Netherlands   Australia
France   Spain   Brazil   Mexico Denmark   UK   Canada   US

Latin European   Germanic   Latin American Nordic European   Anglo Saxon

Concept-first   **Application-first**

Concept-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.
Application-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.

Persuading:

Some cultures, notably the French and Italians, tend toward deductive arguments, focusing on theories and complex concepts before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion.
Others, notably Anglo-Saxon cultures, tend toward inductive arguments, starting with focusing first on practical application before moving to theory.
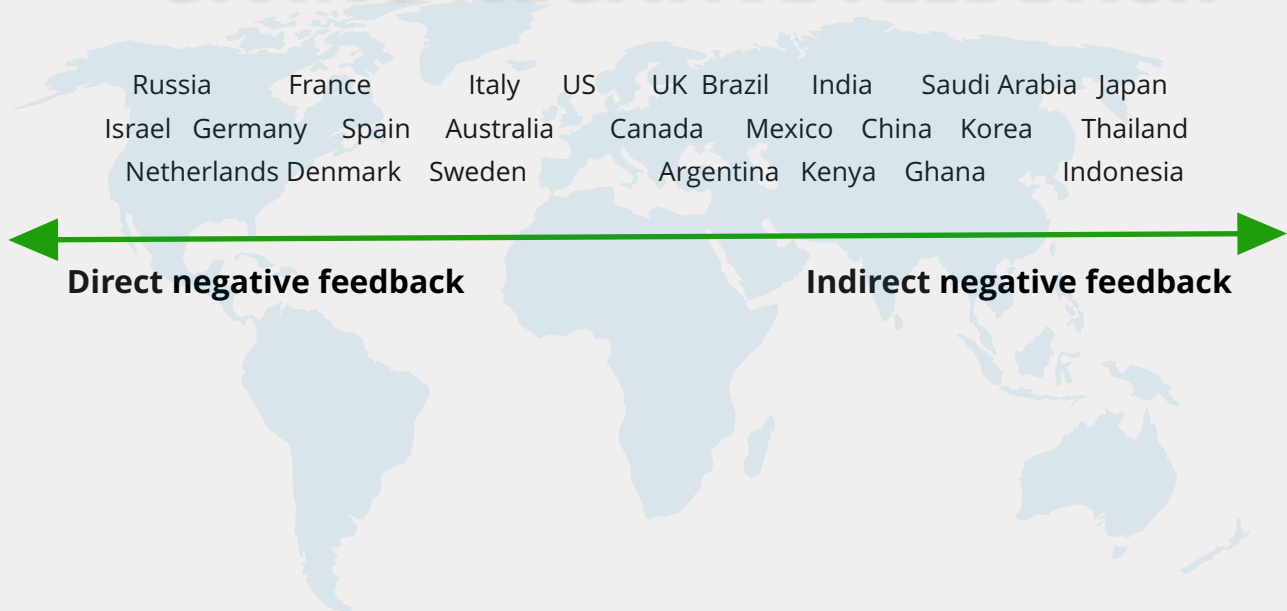This trait shows up in everything from how people give presentations or lead meetings to how they write emails.

SAY
WHAT?

COMMUNICATING

US   Netherlands   Finland   Spain Italy Singapore Iran   China Japan
Australia Germany Denmark Poland Brazil Mexico France India   Kenya   Korea
Canada   UK   Argentina   Russia Saudi Arabia Indonesia

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Low Context   **High Context**

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

Communicating:

Generally, people in the US pride themselves on their straight-talking.
Japan and other East Asian countries represent the other extreme.

SAY
WHAT?

GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Russia   France   Italy   US   UK Brazil   India   Saudi Arabia Japan

Israel Germany Spain Australia   Canada   Mexico China Korea   Thailand

Netherlands Denmark Sweden   Argentina Kenya Ghana   Indonesia

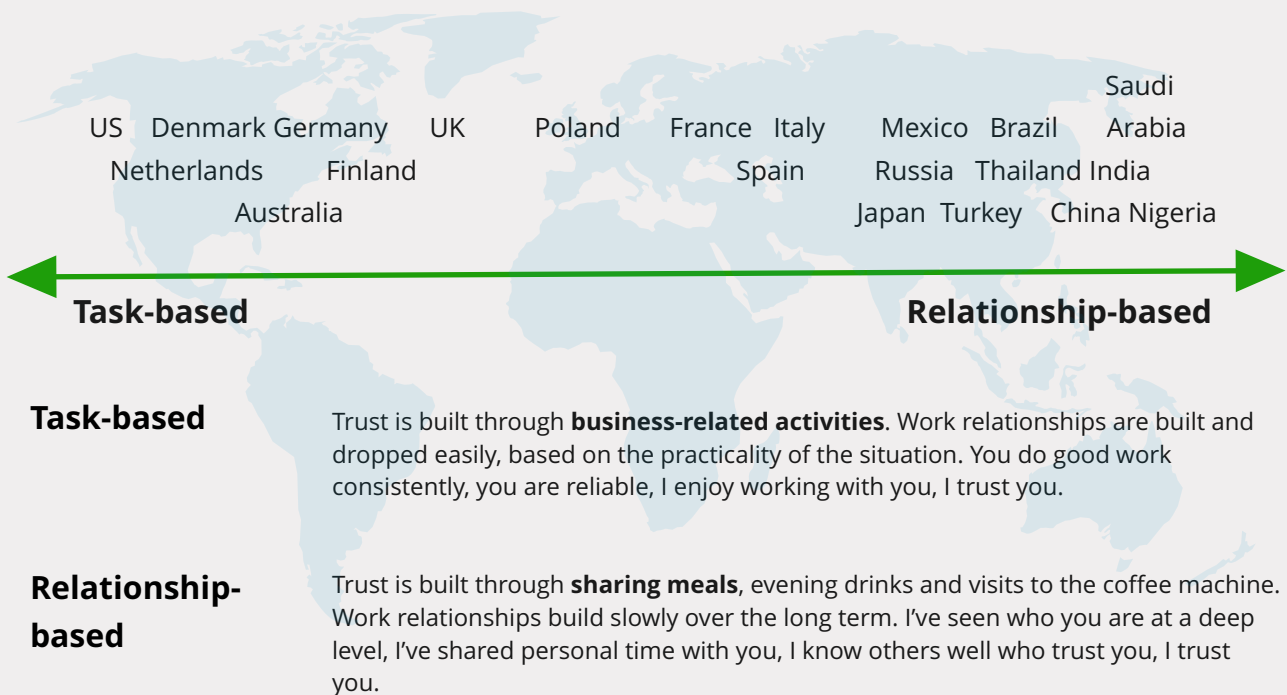**← Direct negative feedback**   **Indirect negative feedback →**

Giving negative feedback:

Americans can be very explicit communicators, but they are in the middle of the spectrum when it comes to giving negative feedback.

Israelis, Russians and Dutch are among the most direct when it comes to negative feedback.

Japanese are among the most indirect.

SAY WHAT?

TRUSTING

									Saudi
US	Denmark	Germany	UK	Poland	France	Italy	Mexico	Brazil		Arabia
Netherlands		Finland				Spain	Russia	Thailand	India
	Australia						Japan	Turkey	China	Nigeria

← Task-based ————————————— **Relationship-based →**

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 to the coffee machine. Work relationships build 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.

Trusting:

In some cultures, notably USA, people don't worry so much about trusting each other because they trust their legal system to enforce contracts, and so business negotiations focus on what's practical.

In others, including many emerging market economies but also to a lesser extent Western Europe, personal relationships are much more important, in part because people don't trust their legal system to enforce contracts.
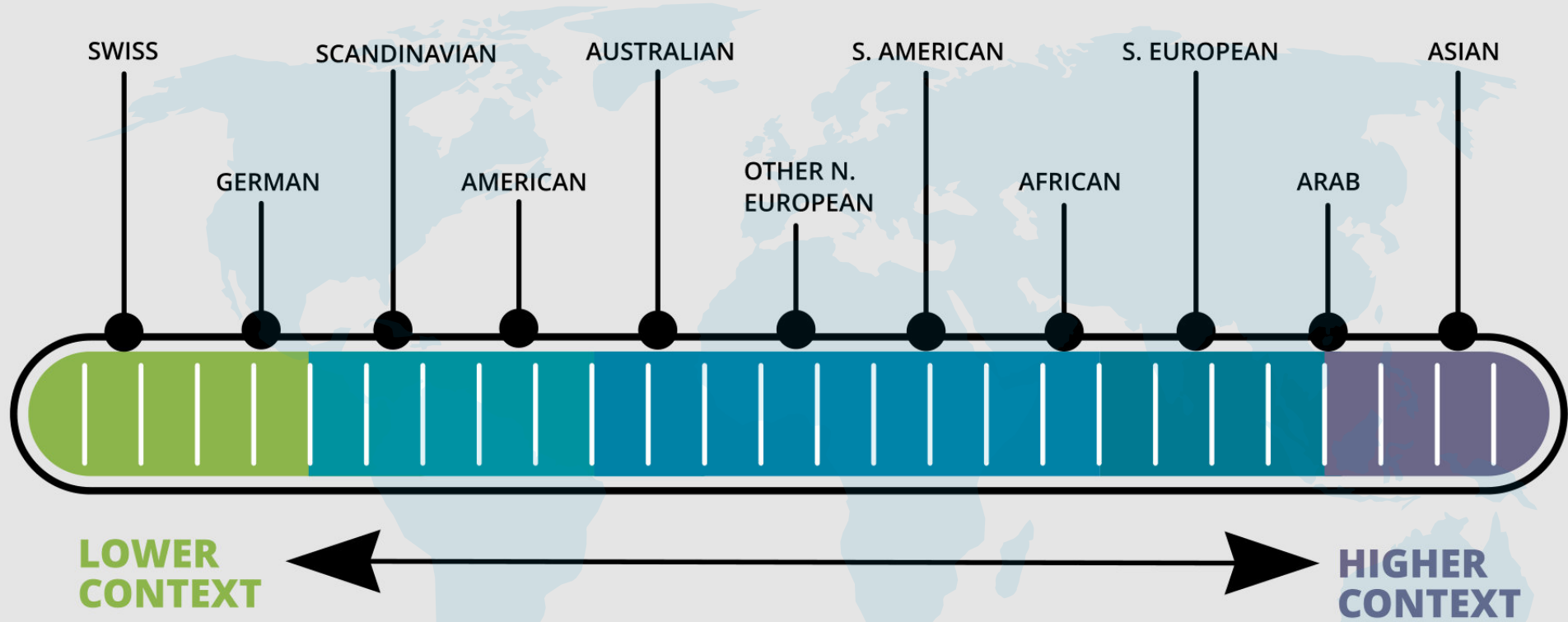
SAY WHAT?

SCHEDULING

Germany Japan Netherlands   Poland   Spain Italy   Brazil China   Saudi Arabia
Switzerland Sweden US UK Czech Republic France   Russia Mexico   India Nigeria
                    Denmark   Turkey   Kenya

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Linear time   **Flexible time**

Linear time	Project steps are approached in a sequential fashion, completing one task before the 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 organisation** 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 **interruption is accepted**. The focus is on adaptability and **flexibility** is valued over organisation.

Scheduling:

For anyone working or travelling abroad, it's clear that different cultures treat time differently. On one extreme you've got the exceedingly precise Germans and Swiss; Americans fall relatively close to this end of the spectrum; Western Europeans and Latin Americans tend to be more flexible; Africa, the Middle East, and India are extremely flexible.

SAY WHAT?

HIGH CONTEXT vs LOW CONTEXT

SWISS

GERMAN

SCANDINAVIAN

AMERICAN

AUSTRALIAN

OTHER N. EUROPEAN

S. AMERICAN

AFRICAN

S. EUROPEAN

ARAB

ASIAN

LOWER CONTEXT

HIGHER CONTEXT

- Communication is linear, precise and open.
- Disagreements are depersonalized. Conflicts do not have to be resolved immediately for work to continue.
- Privacy and personal space are highly valued.
- Verbal messages are explicit and direct. Words are valued above their context.
- Speed is valued. How efficiently something is done is important.
- Task is more important than building relationships

- Communication is indirect and understated.
- People are expected to speak one after another in an orderly fashion.
- Disagreements are personally threatening. It is important to solve conflict immediately
- Standing very close to others is a common practice.
- Speakers often talk around a point (instead of directly to it)
- Greater use of non-verbal communication (incl. body language)

SAY WHAT?