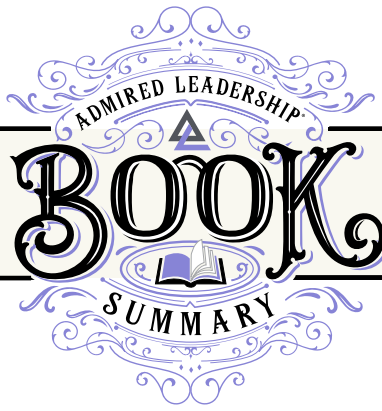**BOOK SUMMARY**

ADMIRED LEADERSHIP
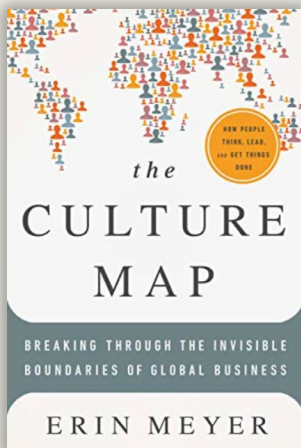
Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours   January 2025

The Culture Map

Decoding How People Think, Lead, and Get Things Done Across Cultures

BOOK AUTHOR: **ERIN MEYER**

Published 2014

All too often our cultural differences can cause miscommunication which can lead to distrust, disagreement, and in the best-case scenarios, comical stories of cultural confusion. With topics such as diversity and globalization becoming increasingly popular, international businesses have sought opportunities to leverage individuals from different cultures to become more productive, efficient, and innovative. As a result, organizations with a more diverse workforce have simultaneously increased the likelihood of cultural miscommunication.

In the book *The Culture Map,* Erin Meyer has developed an eight-scale model to identify and address these cultural miscommunications. The eight scales are: communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, and scheduling (p. 16).

KEY QUOTE

"The way we are conditioned to see the world in our own culture seems so completely obvious and commonplace that it is difficult to imagine that another culture might do things differently. It is only when you start to identify what is typical in your culture, but different from others, that you can begin to open a dialogue of sharing, learning, and ultimately understanding" (p. 244).

KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

Communicating Scale: Low-Context vs. High-Context

The concept of low-context and high-context communication is understood to be culturally distinct. Low-context communication utilizes simple, clear, and explicit language. Conversely, high-context communication uses more nuanced and sophisticated language to convey a more implicit message (pp. 34-39).

When speaking with individuals from cultures that utilize either low-context or high-context communication "one crucial principle to remember is that communicating is not just about speaking but also listening" (p. 50).

Practice engaged listening by asking thoughtful questions. Open-ended questions encourage speakers to explore their ideas and provide richer context. Use clarifying questions to confirm your understanding and ensure accurate communication.

For multi-cultural teams, the use of low-context communication processes can help eliminate potential miscommunication by utilizing simple, clear, and explicit language. When determining the necessary communication protocols, "the best moment to develop the process is when the team is forming, before miscommunication takes place" (p. 57).

Evaluating Scale: Direct Negative Feedback vs. Indirect Negative Feedback

How negative feedback is delivered and received can drastically impact communication processes and professional relationships. Cultural bias can influence how negative feedback messages are framed and communicated, either directly or indirectly (p. 65).

- Direct negative feedback is communicated honestly, explicitly, and bluntly. This feedback is viewed by the recipient as strictly professional with no impact on personal relationships (p. 69).

- Indirect negative feedback is communicated subtly, with soft undertones, and in a diplomatic fashion. This indirect feedback style often incorporates the use of positive feedback to soften the criticism of negative feedback (p. 69).

"Communicate feedback more effectively by clearly establishing whether you'll use a direct or indirect approach. This shared understanding of communication style helps both parties engage more productively in the feedback process."

Communicate feedback more effectively by clearly establishing whether you'll use a direct or indirect approach. This shared understanding of communication style helps both parties engage more productively in the feedback process.

It is important to take a relationship-first based approach to leading multi-cultural teams. This relationship-first approach can be implemented by adjusting our "behavior a bit, to practice humility, to test the waters before speaking up, to assume goodwill on the part of others, and to invest time and energy in building good relationships" (p. 88).

Persuading Scale: Principles-First vs. Applications-First

Persuasion is one of the most powerful tools used to help encourage support from others and turn ideas into realities. Delivering persuasive messages is not just dependent upon the "strength of our message but how we build our arguments and the persuasive techniques we employ" (p. 91).

Persuasive strategies and the reasoning upon which arguments are built are deeply ingrained in our cultural norms of communication. Meyer introduces two types of reasoning, principles-first and applications-first reasoning.

- Principles-first reasoning derives conclusions from general principles and concepts commonly understood by that culture. The importance is on the why as compared to the how (pp. 93-96).

- Applications-first reasoning derives conclusions from factual data points obtained from the real world. The importance is on the how as compared to the why (pp. 93-96).

The importance of cultural relativity is critical to help build more effective and persuasive communication amongst multi-cultural interactions. Cultural relativity focuses not on where a specific country falls on a given scale, but rather on how two cultures position in relation to one another. This awareness of how cultural communication techniques compare to one another allows for adaptability and more effective and persuasive communication (pp. 96-101).

Leading Scale: Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical

Two primary forms of leadership styles are identified to exist in most cultures: egalitarian or hierarchical. "In an egalitarian culture, for example, an aura of authority is more likely to come from acting like one of the team, while in a hierarchical culture, an aura of authority tends to come from setting yourself clearly apart" (p. 122).

"Persuasion is one of the most powerful tools used to help encourage support from others and turn ideas into realities. Delivering persuasive messages is not just dependent upon the "strength of our message but how we build our arguments and the persuasive techniques we employ."

In the 1970's, as a result of over 100,000 management surveys, Geert Hofstede coined the phrase "power distance" which implies, "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (p. 121). As such, leadership can be understood not only as specific actions but also how those who follow, interpret, and understand these actions.

Effective cross-cultural leadership requires understanding how followers from different cultures perceive your leadership actions. This awareness helps you make better decisions about which behaviors to adapt or refine to match your followers' cultural expectations about power and authority.

Being a leader of multi-cultural teams requires flexibility, understanding, and self-awareness. These challenges of cross-cultural leadership can be addressed by taking a proactive approach to understanding our actions and how they are perceived by those who follow. "In today's global business environment, it is not enough to be either an egalitarian leader or a hierarchical leader. You need to be both – to develop the flexibility to manage up and down the cultural scales" (p. 142).

Leadership flexibility and adaptability will help "motivate and mobilize groups who follow in different ways" (p. 142).

Deciding Scale: Consensual vs. Top-Down

The Deciding scale closely emulates that of the Leadership scale where the decision-making process is derived either from a group of individuals, "consensual", or from an individual with significantly more influence over the group, "top-down" (pp. 144-145).

The decision-making process, consensual vs. top-down, is heavily influenced by a culture's beliefs in the timing for which decisions are made and the speed at which they are implemented.

- American culture emphasizes speed and agility, thus favoring a more top-down approach to eliminate multiple inputs. This can be seen in the "first to market" mindset that many organizations display.

- Conversely, German culture favors a more consensual decision-making process which invests additional time in identifying a group decision.

In a global environment, multi-cultural teams "often have expectations about decision making based on the norms of their own societies, which lead them to respond emotionally to what they see as ineffective behaviors of others on the team" (p. 158).

As leaders of multi-cultural teams, it is important to provide early and explicit communication that proactively addresses these potential issues of decision-making miscommunication. This allows for more cohesive collaboration and agreement between multi-cultural teams (pp. 159-160).

Trusting Scale: Task-Based vs. Relationship-Based

In today's increasingly diverse and globalized business world "you can't be successful if your colleagues, customers, partners, and suppliers don't trust you" (p. 165). How trust is developed with others is heavily influenced by cultural beliefs (p. 165).

In a professional setting, building trust can be separated into either a task-based or relationship-based approach.

- Task-based trust can be thought of as the trust placed in another person that they will accomplish the task at hand. More simply put, trust from the head (p. 168).

- Relationship-based trust can be viewed as trust built with others stemming from feelings such as friendship and closeness, a more emotional and personal approach to trust. Trust that is derived from the heart (p. 168).

"Historically, the U.S. mindset of a task-based approach to building trust has dominated the global business environment. Within the last 15 years, the fundamental shift to a more globally diverse business community has incorporated cultures that more closely conform to a relationship-based trust mentality."

Historically, the U.S. mindset of a task-based approach to building trust has dominated the global business environment. Within the last 15 years, the fundamental shift to a more globally diverse business community has incorporated cultures that more closely conform to a relationship-based trust mentality.

Effective cross-cultural leadership will continue to recognize the growing importance of globalization and as teams become more diverse, the importance of incorporating different actions to build trust is imperative to becoming effective leaders and communicators. "As a general rule of thumb, investing extra time developing a relationship-based approach will pay dividends when working with people from around the world" (p. 178).

Disagreeing Scale: Confrontations vs. Non-Confrontations

Cultural differences impact how disagreements are publicly expressed in a professional setting. This form of disagreement can be thought of as either confrontational or non-confrontational.

Confrontational cultures are more open, direct, and explicit in their disagreement with others when their beliefs contrast those expressed. This strong display of public disagreement is viewed "not as a matter of personal emotion, but rather as a valuable intellectual exercise from which the trust emerges" (p. 207). Conversely, in cultures like Japan "it is not easy to separate the opinion from the person" (p. 207).

To help separate the professional and personal, one should leverage the strategies suggested within the Trusting scale. Building effective relationships founded in trust can help alleviate any miscommunication that could potentially occur when professional disagreement amongst individuals from different cultures occur (p. 209).

The concept of cultural relativity continues to reign true within this chapter. As multi-cultural leaders, it is important to be aware that cultural differences exist in how individuals express disagreement with one another. A proactive approach to communicating with culturally diverse teams can help build a framework of how and why these disagreements occur. "Sometimes just a few words of explanation framing your behavior can make all the difference in how your actions are perceived" (p. 218).

Scheduling Scale: Linear-Time vs. Flexible-Time

The Scheduling scale "is a state of mind that affects how you organize your day, how you run a meeting, how far you must plan in advance, and how flexible those plans are" (p. 219). This state of mind is impacted by our cultural and historical experiences that help segment and prioritize time.

- Linear-time prioritizes the completion of tasks in sequential order with a strong sense of organization and adherence to budgets or deadlines (p. 227)

- Flexible-time places an emphasis on approaching tasks with a sense of flexibility and adaptability. Being open to different opportunities as they arise.

"Leaders of culturally diverse teams must be aware of these differences as they are often a source of miscommunication. "Having a clear discussion about scheduling systems up front can ease frustrations that otherwise pop up down the line."

The concept of time and how tasks are completed in the context of business activities can be a profound source of miscommunication of multi-cultural teams. Furthermore, "understanding the subtle, often unexpressed assumptions about time that control behaviors and expectations in various cultures can be quite challenging" (p. 220).

The concept of cultural relativity is critically important when understanding how others segment and view time as this can directly impact the productivity and profitability of a business (p. 227). Leaders of culturally diverse teams must be aware of these differences as they are often a source of miscommunication. "Having a clear discussion about scheduling systems up front can ease frustrations that otherwise pop up down the line" (p. 239).

Becoming a Culture Bridge

As globalization and diversity continues to impact the assembly of our teams and organizations, leaders need to become "cultural bridges" amongst individuals by understanding the impact culture has on communication.
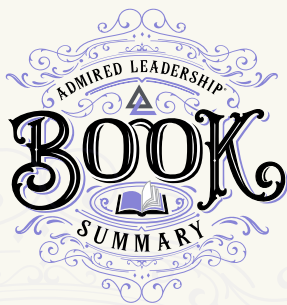
"The way we are conditioned to see the world in our own culture seems so completely obvious and commonplace that it is difficult to imagine that another culture might do things differently. It is only when you start to identify what is typical in your culture, but different from others, that you can begin to open a dialogue of sharing, learning, and ultimately understanding" (p. 244).

One element can change a team's chemistry. The role of serendipity is crucial to success. "Gather enough right people at the right time with the right leader" and the team's performance is lifted (p. 241).

Neurologically, stressors bring people together.
When a stressor is introduced, the team begins to suffer together, creating opportunities for team-mates to bond, grow, and develop a sense of unity. When faced with stressors, teammates rely on each other for emotional and psychological support, ultimately improving performance.

Meyer, E. (2014). **The Culture Map**: *Decoding How People Think, Lead, and Get Things Done Across Cultures*. New York: Public Affairs.

"The way we are conditioned to see the world in our own culture seems so completely obvious and commonplace that it is difficult to imagine that another culture might do things differently. It is only when you start to identify what is typical in your culture, but different from others, that you can begin to open a dialogue of sharing, learning, and ultimately understanding."

The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

We work hard to stay abreast of the current writings on leadership, especially those books our clients are reading or have been recommended to read. As a benefit to our clients and to facilitate our own learning, the Admired Leadership® team has long maintained a tradition of summarizing the newest books of interest to leaders. Better to read a summary for eight minutes before investing 8 hours in the entire book. After reading a good summary, we believe leaders are able to make better choices as to what to ignore, what to peruse and what to make the time to read closely.