

Understanding the Germans

An Introduction to Intercultural Awareness

Heaven is where the police are British, the chefs French, the mechanics German, the lovers Italian and it's all organized by the Swiss.

Hell is where the police are German, the chefs British, the mechanics French, the lovers Swiss and it's all organized by the Italians.

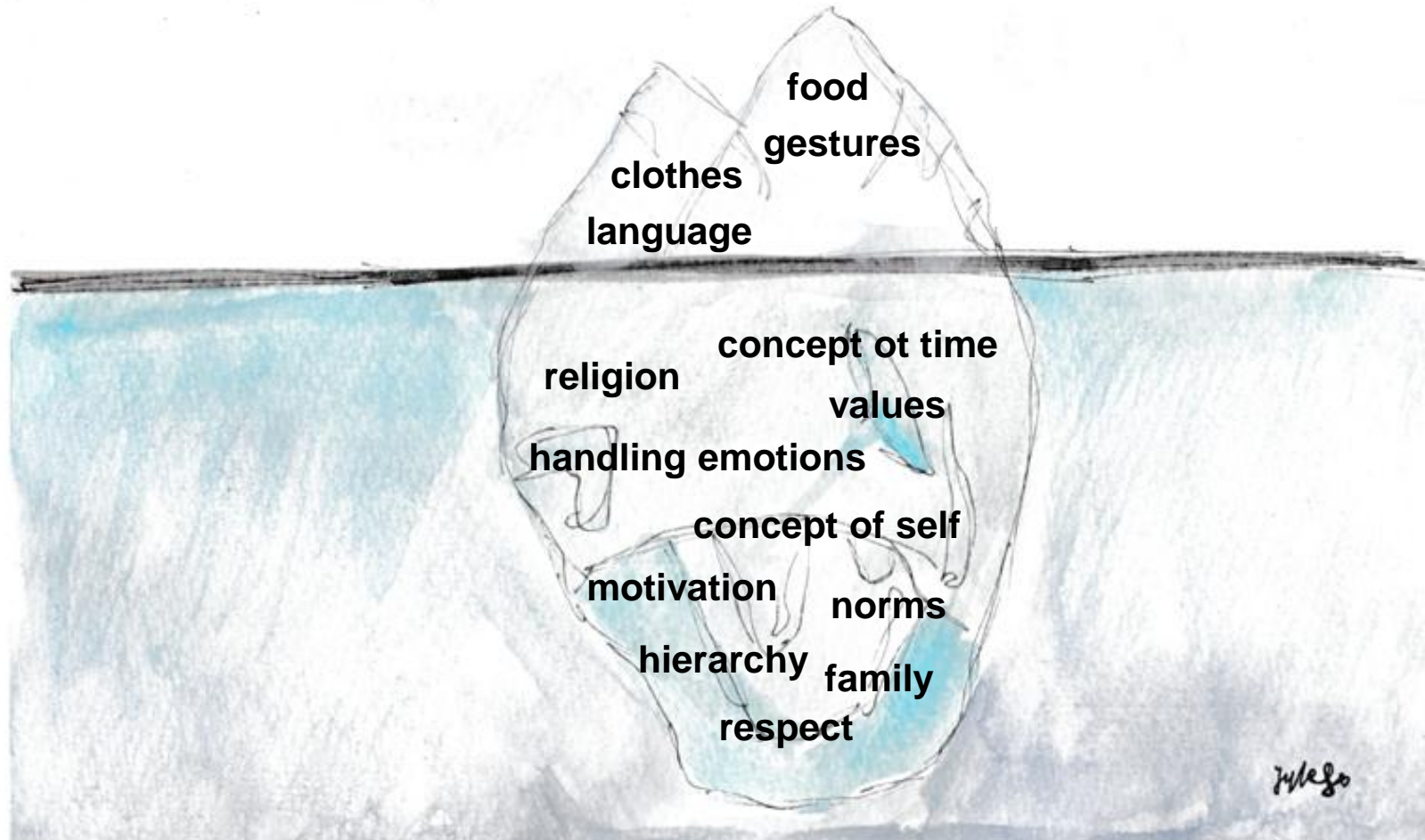




Culture is an **orientation system** for a nation, society, organization or group. It is passed on from generation to generation. It influences perception, thinking, values and actions of all the group members and defines their membership to this group. Culture is a **sub-conscious, action-influencing**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



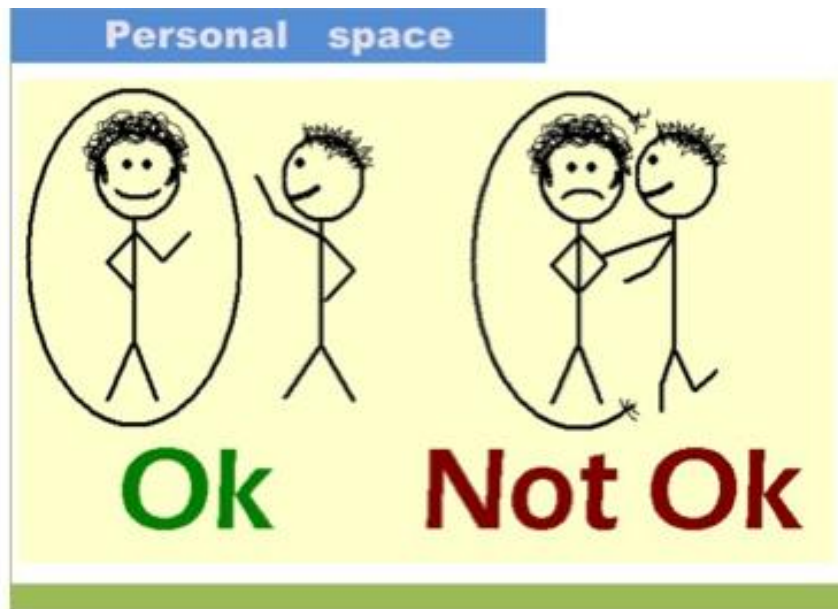
- **Proxemics** (personal space)
- **Time** (monochronic or polychronic understanding of time)
- **Communication** (high context vs low context)

(E.T. Hall, US American Anthropologist)



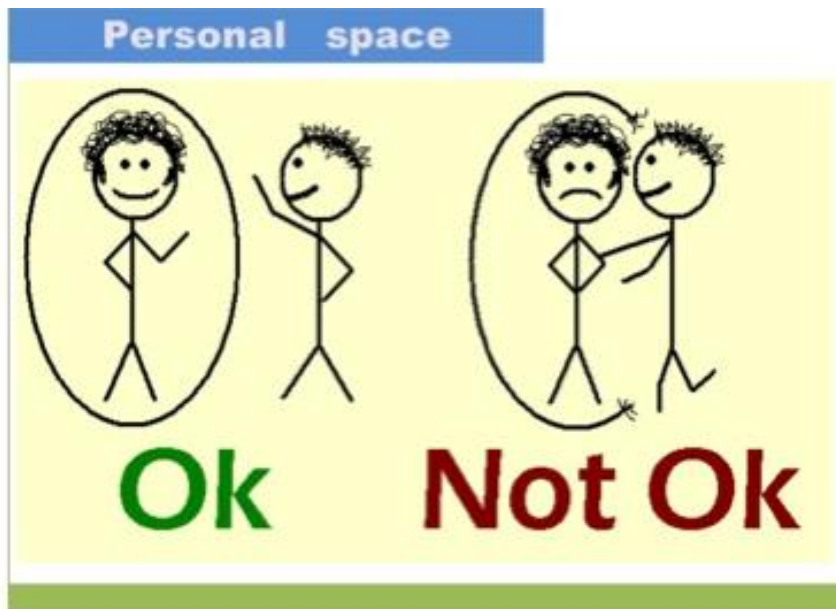
- **Individualism vs Collectivism**
- Power Distance
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Long Term Orientation vs Short Term Orientation
- Masculinity vs Femininity

(Geerd Hofstede, Dutch Psychologist)



Proxemics

- How close do you get to other people (physically close)
- Forms of greeting
- Cultural norm and personal norm



Proxemics in Germany (in non-Covid-19 times):

- Social space, for strangers, workers, salespeople, office staff: 1.2 m to 3.6 m
- Personal space for friends, colleagues: 60 cm to 1m
- Intimate space for family and close friends, body contact allowed: 60 cm and less



- 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

Monochronic vs Polychronic Understanding of Time



Monochronic	Polychronic
Time is limited and must be used wisely	There is enough time for everything, time is used at will
Plans and schedules must be kept strictly	A person does not need to subject themselves to plans and schedules
→ one task after another, extensive planning	→ multiple tasks at the same time, high flexibility



Perception of Time in Germany

- Time is valuable in itself (spend/save/waste time)
- Structured day: ideal use of time
- Serial understanding of time: one thing after another
- **Punctuality = respect (respecting the time planning of others)**
- Deadlines are non-negotiable
- “Feierabend” (quitting time) is sacred, opening hours are strictly adhered to

High Context vs Low Context Communication



High Context

Primary purpose of communication is to form and develop relationships; contextual information is needed

Low Context

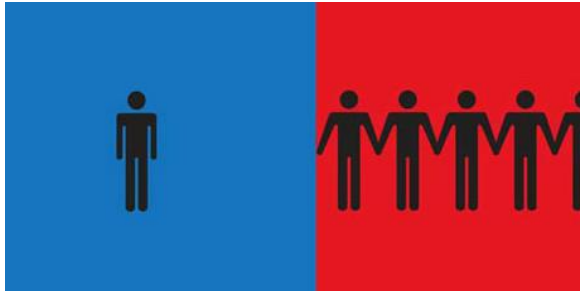
Primary purpose of communication is the exchange of information, facts and opinions

Communication in Germany



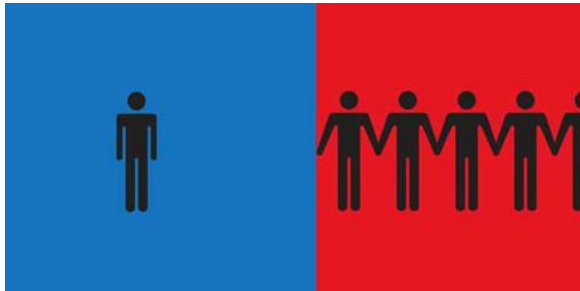
- Task-oriented; meant for exchanging information
- Direct; no hidden message
- *Yes*: agreement and commitment
- *No*: lack of agreement, **not** rejection of the person
- Don't be too loud – show respect by not shouting
- Accept (or deny) any offer immediately, offers might not be repeated
- Small talk is not necessary, you can come directly to the point

Individualisms vs Collectivism



Individualism	Collectivism
Loosely-knit social framework	Tightly-knit social framework
Individual ownership of resources	Resources are shared
Self-actualization is a high goal <i>(live your dreams/do as you please/know what you want)</i>	Harmony and consensus in society are the ultimate goals
Make decisions individually	Make decisions as a group
→ Self responsibility	→ Group responsibility

Individualisms 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!

Cultural 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

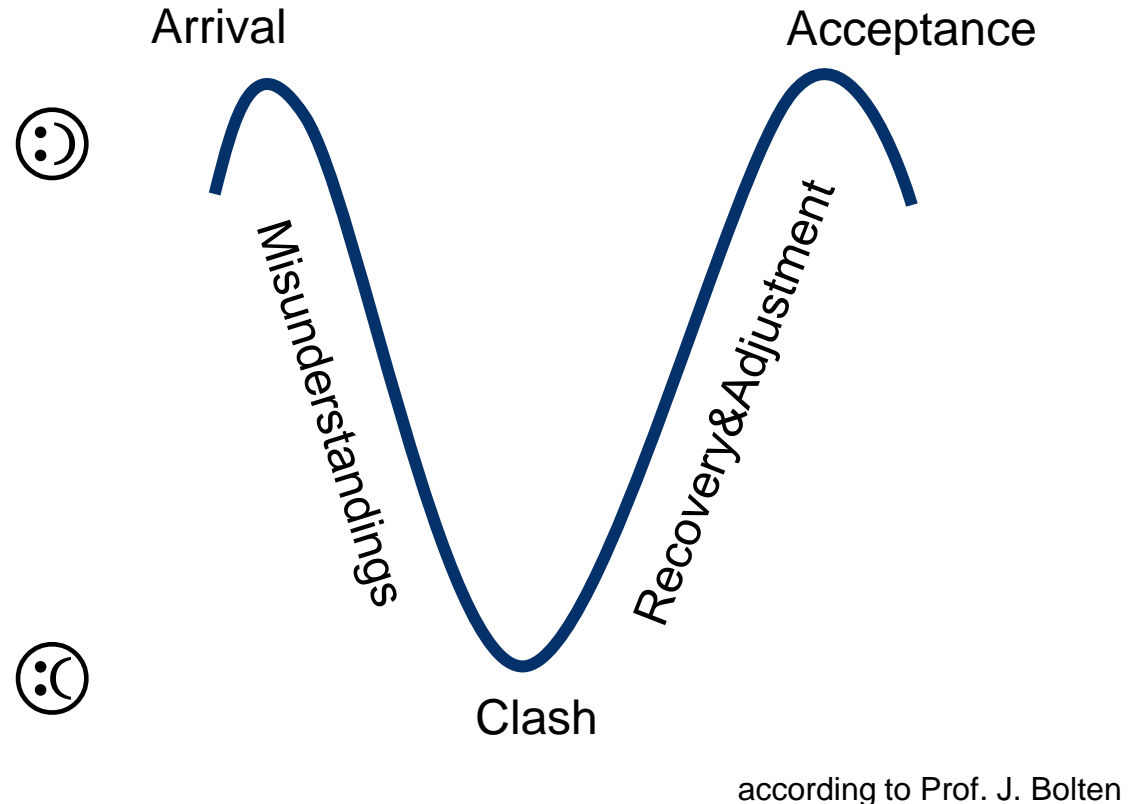


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- Few distinct levels in hierarchy, but show respect and use titles (Prof./Dr.) unless instructed otherwise
- Self responsibility: Each individual must take care of his/her affairs (accommodation, meeting deadlines, etc.)
- Not a typical 'sit down 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



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?



Multiple Aspects in Miscommunication

