Intercultural Project Work

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THM

This lecture will be recorded to publish it after the event.

You will find the recording in the respective moodle course.

Content

- Intercultural Competence

- Intercultural Communication (Edward T. Hall)

- Six Dimensions (Geert Hofstede)

- Conflicts

- Meetings

Disclaimers

This lecture should make you sensitive for cultural differences, not enforce stereotypes or prejudices

Please remember that intercultural competence generalizes topics. Individual experiences can differ from what is said here.

Please note that reality is more divers than theory. There are other cultural backgrounds present in CESI and in THM than just french and german.

Lecturer: Michael Arndt
Duration: 1 h
Recorded: Yes

Be aware that culture sometimes is also used in the context of racism and right wing politics.

Culture

Ballet, Theatre, Music, Art ? Before mid 1990s this was what was meant by culture.

Today, globalisation has changed the concept. Culture also describes

expected differences in living environments and habits.

Example - Greeting situations

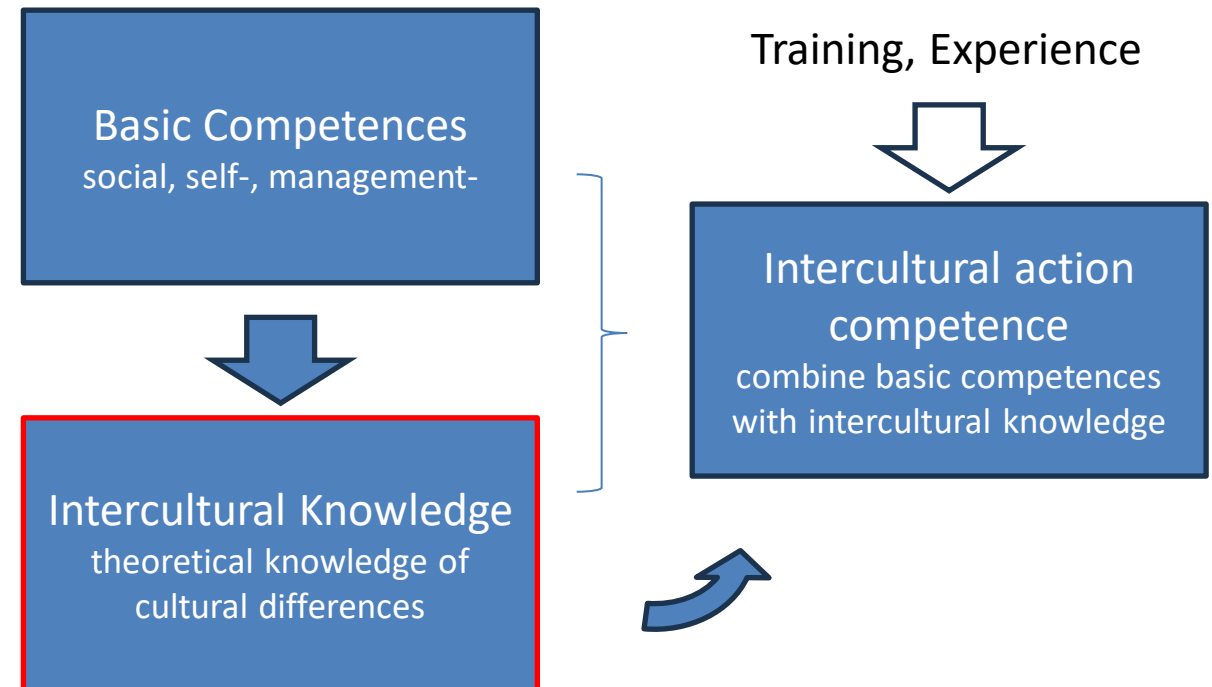In intercultural situations, there is no right or wrong!

Intercultural competences can be learned...

Most People learn their culture during childhood (family, kindergarden, school)...

...but you can learn to understand and act within other cultures later in your life... => Intercultural Competence

We are mostly not aware of our own culture.
We only realize that something is different, when we are confronted with a different culture.

These situations offer an opportunity to acquire intercultural competences.
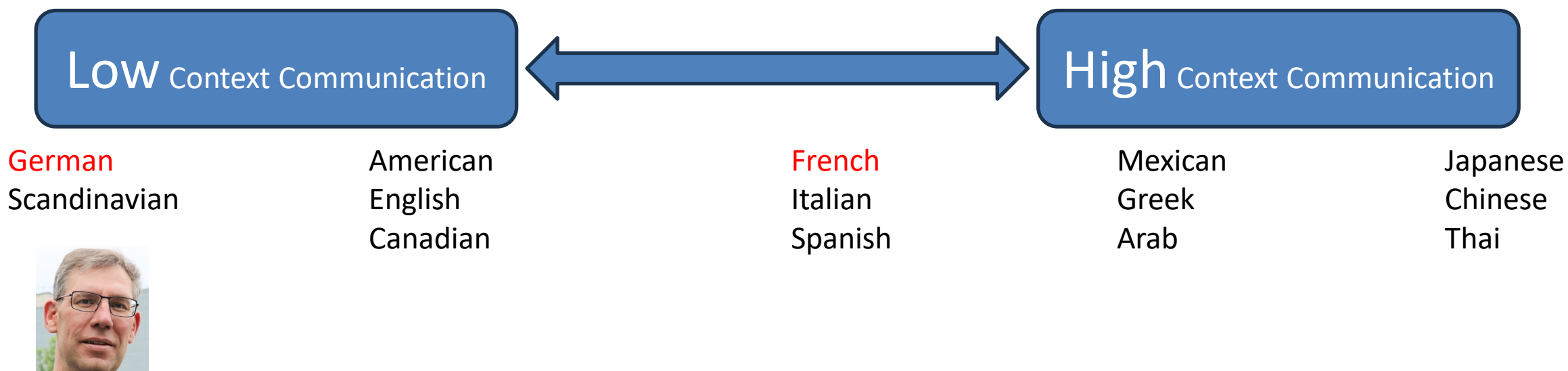
Basic Competences
social, self-, management-

Training, Experience

Intercultural action competence
combine basic competences with intercultural knowledge

Intercultural Knowledge
theoretical knowledge of cultural differences

Intercultural Communication

Cross-Cultural Communication

In globally dispersed organisations, members become more diverse with different national and cultural backgrounds.

Communication can be very different in various countries. Therefore Edward T. Hall has developed the concept of low- and high-context communication.

| **Low** Context Communication | ⟷ | **High** Context Communication |

German	American	French	Mexican	Japanese
Scandinavian	English	Italian	Greek	Chinese
	Canadian	Spanish	Arab	Thai

Low-Context and High-Context Communication (Edward T. Hall)

Germany is a Low-Context Culture

France is more towards a High-Context Culture

Low-Context Communication means, that the content will be nearly completely be communicated by words.

There is minimum information that will not be communicated by direct communication (=speaking). Criticism, problems, weaknesses can all be directly articulated. This allows to discuss issues without hurting anybody. Direct, constructive and honest feedback is expected.

High-Context Communication means, that communication happens on many channels. Facial expressions, gestures and the relationship between persons play a major role. In france people often have a common context which is a base for communication. Context can be the private or professional situation, experiences, education and others. Because this context is known, it will not be explicitly be mentioned in the communication. What is being said therefore is only part of what is communicated, because the context takes over the rest.
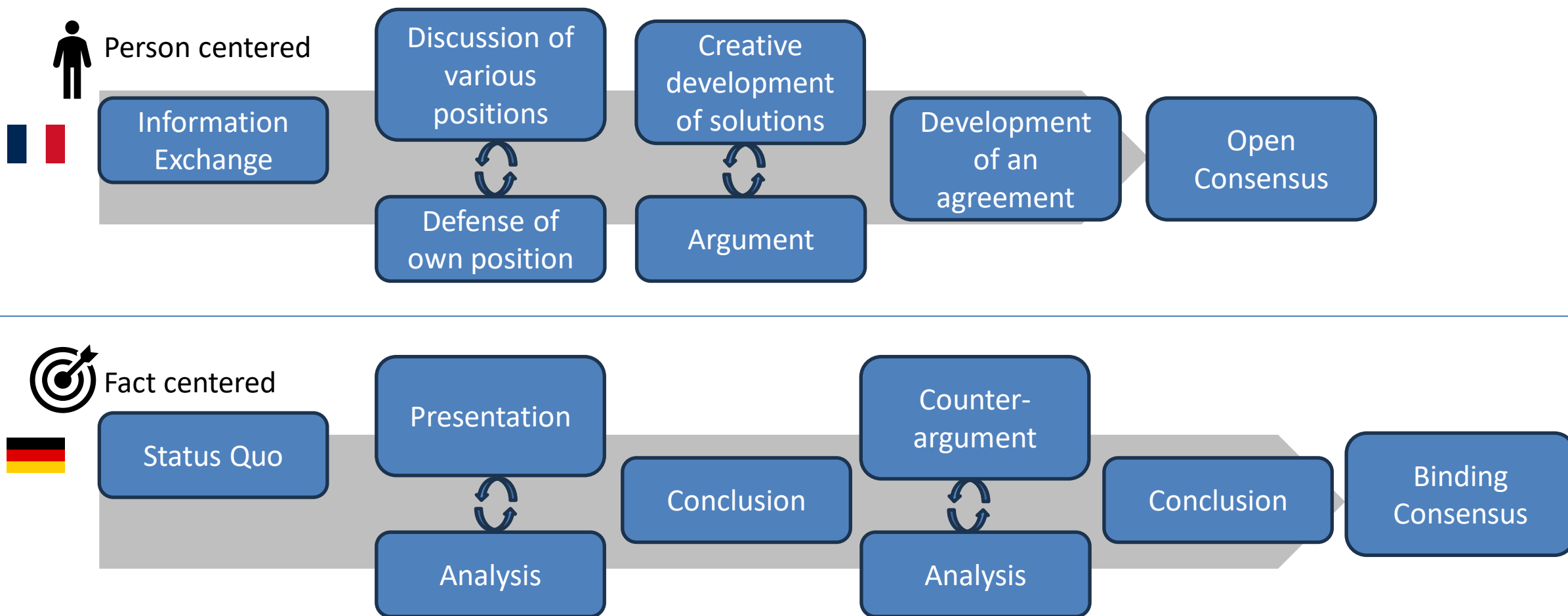
Characteristics of High-Context Communication

- Strong use of nonverbal signals

- Indirect communication is seen as an art form

- Conflicts should be resolved before work can begin

- Professional relationships are based on trust and develop slowly

- One's own identity is more rooted in the group

- Thought patterns are more holistic and deductive (from general rules to specific cases)

- There are few binding rules

- Information is often acquired through informal networks

Characteristics of Low-Context Communication

- Messages are more likely to be made via words and less non-verbally

- Communication is more direct and is considered a means of exchanging information

- Conflicts are depersonalized and work can move forward even in the face of conflicts

- Business relationships begin and end more quickly and are based more on factual considerations and less on the level of trust between partners

- One's own identity is rooted more in one's own person and is more likely to be based on one's own achievements

- Thought patterns tend to be structured and inductive (from specific cases to general rules)

- Specific instructions are given and information flows along formal, hierarchically defined channels

Communication Models - France/Germany

Person centered

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Information Exchange	Discussion of various positions	Creative development of solutions	Development of an agreement	Open Consensus
	Defense of own position	Argument		

Fact centered

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Status Quo	Presentation	Conclusion	Counter-argument	Conclusion	Binding Consensus
	Analysis		Analysis		

Some hints for intercultural communication

- Be open
- Accept differences and diversity
- Try to find common ground or connections
- Take your time do not build up pressure
- Smalltalk, build a relationship
- Use hierachy if necessary
- Be clear - especially with questions
- Use writing if necessary (e.g. a protocol, a whiteboard), document your results
- Do not use humor, sarcasm, irony
- Check for misunderstandings

Dimensions

Six dimensions of culture in the business environment (Geert Hofstede)

1. Power Distance Index (PDI)

2. Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

3. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

4. Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

5. Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

6. Indulgence versus Restraint (IND)

PDI
Acceptance of the status quo by persons less powerful. High PDI means hierachy is more accepted. Low PDI means equality is seeked.

IDV
individual self-determination versus collective integration. High IDV means a focus on individual life. Low IDV means a wish to integrate into the company.

UAI
High UAI means that an insecure future is seen negatively. Rules and Security is seeked. Low UAI stands for risk acceptance.

MAS
High MAS stands for masculine values like dominance, performance, recognition. Low stands for feminine values: Cooperation, equality, care.

LTO
High values stand for long term orientation (frugality, persistance), low values for short term orientation (flexibility, egoism)

IND
High values mean that individuals follow their interests and impulses. Low values stand for the control of individual wishes.

Cultural Dimensions France - Germany

Dimension	France	Germany
Power Distance Index	68	35
Individualism versus Collectivism	71	67
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	43	66
Masculinity versus Femininity	86	65
Long-Term Orientation	63	83
Indulgence versus Restraint	48	40

Main differences are in the acceptance of hierachy and authority (France higher than in Germany), uncertainty avoidance (Germany higher than in France), masculine values (France higher than Germany) and in long term orientation (Germany higher than in France)

What does it mean?

In France, employees expect clear directions from their superiors. In Germany, employees expect to be involved in decisions. In France it is not so common to contradict superiors. In Germany employees find it normal to contradict superiors if they see a good reason.

In Germany, differing thoughts and behavior are more often suppressed. Tasks tend to be very much structured. Superiors tend to be interested in every detail and are expected to know every answer (if asked by their superiors). In France a higher tolerance against other ideas is present. Structure is less important. Superior do not have to know everything. Superiors are more involved with strategy than with day to day activities.

In France, superiors are definite and like to decide. Competition within teams is supportedand signs of success are visible. In Germany, consensus is seeked, employees are treated equally where possible and relationships are important.

In Germany, traditions are important and plans are more long term. Tradition will be adapted to the present times. Endurance and Persistance are characteristics that are highly valued. In France long term planning is not as important. Consumption is more important than in Germany. Loosing your face should be avoided.

Conflicts

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Conflicts

Situations or Interactions between two or more persons during which at least one person feels uncomfortable - which means that this person feels anger, fear, fury or similar emotions.

Examples:

- Someone in your team acts in a way that has negative consequences for you

- You have trusted that someone will do something, but this person did not do so. Now you feel disappointed.

Conflicts often have negative influences on the course of a project. Therefore conflicts should be resolved or at least be pacified.

Conflicts can be positive

- Conflicts impede stagnation, because they enforce the exchange of positions and goals. They can accelerate change.

- Conflicts can make problems visible. So, the cause of a problem can be eliminated.

- Conflicts can support the emerging of positions about certain topics. They can also enforce self-knowledge of the involved persons.

Why do conflicts evolve?

Conflicts very often evolve from the following issues:

- unclear tasks or goals

- unclear responsibilities

- different views on how to tackle a problem or task (Process or Methods)

- the question who has given which information to whom and why did this information not trigger an action

- personality mismatches

- open or hidden claims to power

In an intercultural context this can be enforced by misunderstandings or unexpected actions of involved persons due to differences in norms and values.

"Hot" and "Cold" Conflicts

Hot conflicts result in intensive discussions, a loud, aggressive voice, not acting according to rules (e.g. interjections), silence, missing in meetings, being late or leaving early, saying yes but meaning no.

Hint: Germans tend to have hot conflicts. In germany a hot conflict is seen as easier to solve. Therefore conflicts often will be escalated to make it hot.

Cold conflicts are not visible. They can smolder for long time without getting hot. Participants try to damage their opponent(s) without being discovered.

Hint: In great britain people become sarcastic or ironic if they do not agree. In asia people sometimes smile when the do not agree.

In France conflicts sometimes lead to passive resistance (saying yes but not meaning it), not turning up in meetings, being late.

Conflict Levels and Diagnosis

Hardening → Polarisation and Debate → Actions instead of Words → Worries about Image and Coalitions → Loss of Face → Threatening → Limited Blows, Shattering, Burned Earth

Diagnosis (The conflict mediator must be neutral!)

- What is the context of the conflict?
- What are causes of the conflict?
- What is the conflict level?
- How did this conflict evolve?

Solution Strategies

Escape / Play Dead strategy

The conflict will be kept hidden until there is no way around it anymore. Common in asian cultures.

Fight and subdue strategy

The conflict opponents will openly fight with each other and one party will win. Common in eastern european cultures.

Compromising

The conflict will be discussed, positions will be made clear. A consensus or a compromise will be searched. Common in western european cultures.

Consultation and Delegation

The conflict will be shifted to other persons if no solution can be found. Often experienced mediators or consultants are taken in for conflict management. Common in western european cultures.

Hints for Conflict Management

- Do everything to avoid conflicts in your team (e.g. by rules, relationships, respect etc.)
- Continuously look for potential conflicts. Try to solve them as early as possible.

If there is a conflict

- Reflect your own actions.
- Try to take up the position of your opposite person.
- Do not speculate - better ask.
- Try not to defend yourself.
- Use formal (written) communication, if possible. Be clear in your communication.
- Respect your conflict partner.
- Try to establish a relationship, otherwise conflict solution will not be sustainable.
- Emphasize the wish to find a solution. Point out advantages of such a solution.
- Divide between factual and emotional level.
- Seek for help if the conflict cannot be solved by the team itself.

Meetings

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Hints for better (intercultural) Meetings

Prepare the Meeting

- Synchronize goals and agenda befor the meeting
- Distribute material before the meeting
- Invite everybody properly, define the roles and claryfy expectations

Leave enough time

- for smalltalk and breaks
- for questions
- for comments

Visualize and document

- visualize your discussions (e.g. on a whiteboard)
- document results in a protocol

Collect feedback

- Actively collect feedback at the end of the meeting
- try to use the feedback to improve your meetings

Summary

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We have talked about the expression "**culture**" and the term "**context**".

I have explained **intercultural communication** in terms of low-context and high-context communication. I have also shown you the difference in communication models between france and germany and gave you some hints for your own communication.

I have then explained the **six dimensions of culture** after Geert Hofstede and have shown you some more differences between France and Germany concerning these dimensions.

Finally we have talked about **conflicts** that can arise from cultural differences, but also from other triggers and how they can be managed. I have also given some hints on how to organize am meeting to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.

Thank You!

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