

Culture shock at the office

READING

LEVEL
Intermediate

NUMBER
EN_BE_3902R

LANGUAGE
English






Goals

- Can read and understand the main points of a text about culture shock.
- Can discuss cultural differences in the workplace using appropriate vocabulary.





What happens when you find yourself
in an **unfamiliar workplace culture**?

You might experience **culture shock**
as you try to figure out your new
surroundings.

Of course, the best cure for culture
shock is **talking about it**, which is
what you'll do today!



Vocabulary review slide

disorientation

transferable

**intercultural
awareness**

ideals

adequate

**changing
concepts**

re-entry



**being up to
speed**



Vocabulary review slide

re-entry shock

momentous

rituals

unanticipated

social norms

**a period of
transition**

**societal
changes**

unforeseen

transition

unexpected





Sentences slide



I moved back to the UK from China six months ago. During this **period of transition**, I've had **unexpected** challenges.

I thought I would **be up to speed** on British culture, but I missed a lot during eight years in China. That's why I had **re-entry shock**!



There are **changing concepts** about office culture. Nothing **momentous** but small things, like texting your boss, are now normal here.

I am more **disoriented** than I expected. I had become so used to China and their **social norms**. Since I left, there were many **societal changes** in the UK.





Sentences slide



The changing nature of socialising with colleagues was **unanticipated**. I had no idea that it was so important to meet at the pub.

When I left, it was **adequate** to simply chat with your boss. Now it seems normal for them to be your friend on all the social media—yikes!



My time in China helped me develop good **intercultural awareness**, so I'm sure I'll get used to things soon.

Even in China, I was very British in my behaviour and **ideals**—like how I saw the world and how I tried to work. Unless there are more **unforeseen** shocks, I'll be okay.





Planning for a year abroad

When I left home to work in Germany I knew there would be **unanticipated** differences in the workplace. However, the **re-entry shock** I experienced when I arrived back home was totally **unexpected**.

When I finished school, I wanted to live abroad, and had contacted many startups around Europe about internships. I planned to get work experience, learn a language, and also **expand** my **intercultural awareness**. Since I had studied international business, I hoped that these skills would be **transferable** to whatever I decided to do next. I met with our school career advisor, who said that first impressions are everything. She said that I should wear a suit, address everyone as *Mr* or *Ms* and write a handwritten thank you note, as a thank you email would not be **adequate**. Since I had worked in a big British bank the past summer, I was used to this kind of **formal culture**.



Suit and tie or jeans and trainers?

I was thrilled when a German startup called DigiSports contacted me. Imagine how silly I felt when I showed up in a smart outfit and a briefcase when everyone in the office was wearing jeans, t-shirts and trainers. I had never seen an office like this! Instead of the quiet, glass-**enclosed** offices I was used to, this felt like a big living room with sofas and coffee mugs everywhere, and even a dog! The manager, Jens Kraus, came out to meet me. *Nice to meet you Mr. Kraus*, I said and shook his hand. He laughed and said, *Just call me Jens*. Despite my **nerves**, we got on quite well. I was offered a six-month internship.





Diving in to a new business culture



I realised that the startup world in Berlin had its own **social norms**: much less **hierarchy** and **formality** than the traditional workplace. They'd adapted to **changing concepts** of office life. People worked anywhere, anytime. Some colleagues showed up at 11 a.m., others at 7 a.m., but all were committed to their work. Instead of formal meetings with managers, we all sat around a big table, drank coffee, ate doughnuts and chatted about our work. The leaders wanted **to be up-to-speed** on everyone's progress. If someone was stuck on a problem or needed help, they didn't get in trouble. Instead, we'd talk about it.



The narrator calls her mum to describe the interview.
Fill in the gaps with the words in the word bank.

period of
transition

unanticipated

adequate

up-to-speed



momentous

unexpected

disorientated

intercultural
awareness

Hi, sweetie! How was the interview today?

Oh no! Well, I guess if you get the job, you'll have to get _____ on office culture. I'm sure you'll figure it out in no time.

Good, and of course, when you start any new job—here or in Germany—there's always a _____ as you get oriented.

I'm sure you were more than _____! I'll bet you did great, even with the _____ challenges.

You would not believe this office! There were so many _____ things... like everyone wears jeans. I looked so out of place. It wasn't one _____ difference, but a lot of small things.

You're right. I felt a little _____. It was a different culture than I'm used to, but at least everyone was nice. I like the manager who interviewed me.

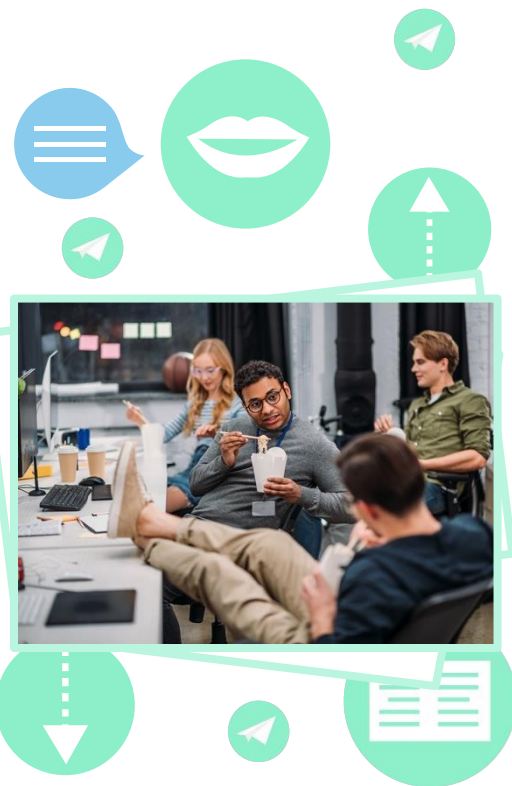
Thanks, mum. You give the best advice. I hope I was okay in the interview. At least I've gained some _____.



Culture shocks in the working world

The narrator points out some of the things that surprised her about her workplace in Germany. Complete the table and compare and contrast her two workplaces.

Formal British Bank	German Startup Office
quiet workplace, everyone has their own office	_____
_____	informal discussions with bosses and leadership
expected to wear business attire	_____
_____	very direct with criticism





Your ideal workplace



Reflect on the British and German offices you compared and contrasted in the previous slide.

Which workplace feels more familiar to you?

What type of workplace would you rather work in?



Challenges adjusting to a new culture

Of course, it wasn't all **rainbows and sunshine!**

I was adjusting to both a new style of working and a new culture. For example, I learned that Germans are really direct with **criticism**. At first, it hurt my feelings, but soon I got used to it, and even found it helpful.

Although the startup world has great **ideals**, especially the idea of having more equal power structures, I missed some of the comfort and clarity my typical British office had given me. I'd had firm deadlines, a clear hierarchy of managers to speak with, and received formal, but polite, feedback. I'd also felt like I could more easily **trade** work for regular life at 6 p.m.



Changes in working culture

At DigiSports, sometimes it felt like work never stopped. The **unforeseen consequence** of flexible working hours, I suppose, is that you have the flexibility to work at 11 a.m. and 11 p.m. Should I answer that email or text from a co-worker at 10:30 a.m. on a Saturday?





Changes in working culture



The startup culture mirrors the **societal changes** happening in the whole world: we're more connected than ever, more open and less **formal** with each other, and there are fewer and fewer occasions to wear your fanciest business suit. I actually stayed at DigiSports for three years and became their assistant director of marketing. I got used to wearing denim shorts to the office, and loved laughing and hanging out with my colleagues.



Pros and Cons

Having experienced both culture shock and re-entry shock, the narrator can see the pros and cons of different aspects of workplace culture. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each of the items below.

flexible working
hours

a formal,
traditional office

non-hierarchical
and non-
traditional work
relationships

casual and
laid-back office



Email request

-□×

To: intern@DigiSports.de

Subject: Internship questions

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a 23-year-old university student from Kyoto, Japan. I am interested in completing a marketing internship in Berlin. I study languages (English and German) and advertising. I am contacting you with a few questions about the company. I would like to better understand the company culture and expectations at DigiSports. Do you have any tips to make the transition to the German workplace easier? I am interested in both your positive and negative impressions. Thank you!

Best wishes,
Yuko Ahn

You receive an email from another student interested in working in a German startup. Draft a brief response to her on the following slide.



Email response

- □ ×

To: zukoahn@unimail.jp

Subject: Internship at DigiSports

Hi Yuko,

Thank you for your email. I'm happy to answer your questions. I also was new to both Germany and startup culture a few months ago...

Respond to Yuko's email.
Be sure to answer her questions and provide useful details!



Re-entry shock

Six months ago, I returned to the UK and felt totally **disoriented**. I thought to myself: this is my native country so it shouldn't be difficult! Starting over was hard, as I had not kept in touch with many former colleagues.



Reflecting on my experience

I felt like some people didn't understand why I'd gone abroad. For me, working in Germany had been a **momentous** part of my life, while others just thought I was out of step with the British working world. Just as I'd **transitioned** into the German world, I've had to focus on my **re-entry** into British office culture—tea and **formality** included.





Identify which of the statements are true and correct any that are false.

1. Coming back to the UK felt easy and natural.

2. The narrator admits that she did not keep in touch with many colleagues.

3. Most people were very impressed with her experience.

4. The narrator does not think her experience in Germany was a big deal.

5. People thought she was not up-to-speed with the British working world.

6. Transitioning to Germany was easy, transitioning back to the UK was hard.



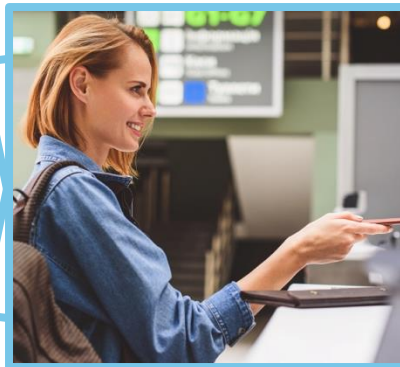
The most unexpected thing for me was...

**You talk to four friends who have had experiences working abroad.
Use reported speech to discuss their biggest culture shocks.**

When I worked in France, I found it really hard to make friends at first. People kept their distance.



I'm a polite person, but when I was on assignment in Japan, I felt so rude! People there are much less direct.



For me, having to speak Russian was simply the hardest part. It took me so long to get used to that!



When I worked in New York, I felt guilty for taking a week long holiday. Most Americans are workaholics!





Going away and coming back

Imagine you left home to work abroad. Reflect on what might be challenging about coming back afterwards.

Discuss the following questions.



Have you ever experienced re-entry shock after being away, even just for a short amount of time?

If I returned home after being away for a long time, I'd have to get used to...

Something that would probably strike me as strange about my home country is...



Getting ready for re-entry

Imagine you have a former co-worker who has been living and working in China for the past seven years. He's nervous about returning home. Give him advice about how he can reduce his **re-entry shock**.





Reflect on the goals

Go back to the second slide of the lesson and check if you have achieved all the goals of the lesson.

yes

no





Reflect on this lesson

Think about everything you have seen in this lesson.
What were the most difficult activities or words? The easiest?



If you have time, go over
the most difficult slides again



Answer key (1/2)

Exercise p. 12

German startup office: open, casual workplace that looks like a living room
British Bank: formal meetings with manager
German startup office: casual, employees can wear jeans and trainers
British bank: feedback tends to be more polite

Exercise p. 11

There were so many unexpected things; it was not one momentous difference, but a lot of small things; you'll have to get up-to-speed on office culture; I felt a little disorientated; there's always a period of transition; At least I've maybe gained some intercultural awareness; I'm sure you were more than adequate; even with the unanticipated challenges



Answer key (2/2)

Exercise p. 22

1. False: she felt disorientated
2. True
3. False: many people did not understand why she'd gone abroad
4. False: she thinks it was a momentous part of her life
5. True
6. False: both were challenging

Exercise p. 23

- He said that when he'd worked in France, he had found it hard to make friends at first. He said that people kept their distance.
- She thinks that she's a polite person, but when she was in Japan, she felt rude! She said that people were much less direct there.
- She told me that speaking Russian had been the hardest part. He said it had taken him so long to get used to that.
- She said that she'd felt guilty about taking a week-long holiday when she worked in New York. She believes that most Americans are workaholics.





Match the title to the description

A

A time in which you get used to a new situation, such as a new job, a move, or another life change.

B

Understanding and respecting different cultures and their characteristics, practices, and values.

C

An adjective to describe something that is surprising or was not expected

D

the challenges related to arriving back in one's home country after a period away.

1. period of transition

2. re-entry shock

3. intercultural awareness

4. unforeseen



Advice about a new culture

You have a new co-worker from Australia. Use the vocabulary words below to write sentences in which you give them advice about adjusting to the new culture of your office and country.

societal
changes

momentous

disorientation

ideals

being up-to-
speed

unanticipated



You might not be used to...





Homework answer key

Exercise p. 31
1a, 2d, 3b, 4c

