

READING

# Culture shock at the office

**LEVEL**

Upper-Intermediate  
(B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_2011R

**LANGUAGE**

English

## Learning outcomes

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



## Warm-up

**Have you ever felt  
like a stranger in  
your own country?**

**Share your answer with the  
rest of the class!**





# DigiSports (1/2)

**Read** the first part of the text.

When I finished school in London, I wanted to live abroad, and had contacted many startups around Europe about internships. I planned to get work experience, learn a language, and 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 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.

I was thrilled when a German startup called DigiSports contacted me. I showed up in a smart outfit and a briefcase, but everyone in the office was wearing jeans, t-shirts and trainers!

# DigiSports (2/2)

1. Continue **reading** the text.
2. **Answer** the questions below.

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! Despite my nerves, we got on quite well. I was offered a six-month internship.

I quickly got up to speed on startup culture in Berlin. It 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. Instead of formal meetings with managers, we all sat around a big table, drank coffee, ate doughnuts and chatted about our work.



Which workplace feels more familiar to you - the British bank or the German startup?

What are the benefits of working at a more traditional company? What are the cons?

Does your workplace have flexible working hours?





I quickly got **up to speed!**

If you are **up to speed**, you have all the most recent information you need about something.

Do you think it would take someone new a long time to get **up to speed** at your workplace?



# Matching

**Match** the words to their definitions.

1

**unanticipated**

**a**

anxiety

2

**nerves**

**b**

to increase in size, number, or importance

3

**enclosed**

**c**

A generally accepted way of thinking, feeling, and behaving by members of a group or a society.

4

**social norms**

**d**

not expected or predicted

5

**expand**

**e**

surrounded or closed off on all sides



# Fill in the gaps



Hi, sweetie! How was the interview today?

You would not believe this office! They don't have \_\_\_\_\_ offices like at the bank, and everyone here wears jeans. I looked so out of place. It wasn't one \_\_\_\_\_ difference, but a lot of small things.



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.

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.



**enclosed**

**unanticipated**

**up to speed**

**disoriented**

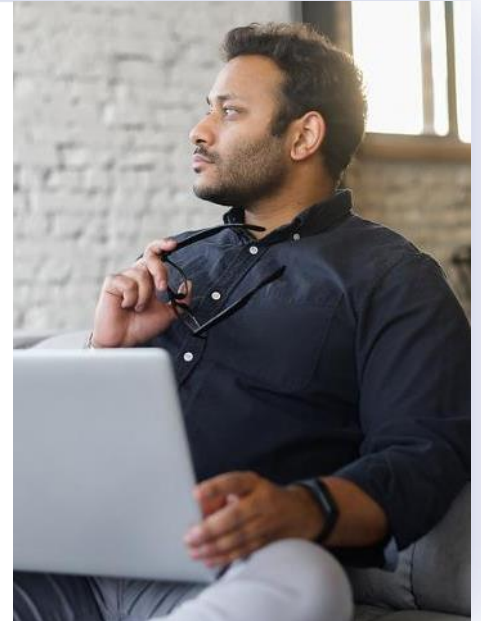


# Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Read** the text.
2. **Choose** the title below that best describes the text.

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.

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.



A smooth transition back home

Feeling disoriented in my home country

Out of step in Germany



# True or false

1. **Read** the statements.
2. **Decide** if they are *true* or *false*.

		true	false
1	Coming back to the UK felt easy and natural for the narrator.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	The narrator admits that she did not keep in touch with many colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Most people were very impressed with her experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	The narrator does not think her experience in Germany was a big deal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Transitioning to Germany was easy, transitioning back to the UK was hard.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Going away and coming back

1. **Imagine** leaving your country to work abroad for six months.
2. In breakout rooms or together as a class, **answer** the questions.



What might be challenging about coming back home?

What would you probably have to get used to again?

What would strike you as being strange?



# End of the lesson

Idiom

***to move a mile a minute***

**Meaning:** to move very quickly, or to operate or do something very rapidly

**Example:** My thoughts are moving a mile a minute! I have so many ideas!



# Additional practice





# Fill in the gaps



Hi, sweetie! How were your \_\_\_\_\_ on your first day at DigiSports?

I was a bit \_\_\_\_\_, but I guess that's normal when everything is so new and different from what I'm used to!



Well, I'm sure it'll take you no time to get \_\_\_\_\_ on everything.

You're right. I'll have to adjust to the \_\_\_\_\_ in Germany, but once I do, I think I'll really appreciate it here.



**social norms**

**disoriented**

**up to speed**

**nerves**



# Categorise

**Categorise** the statements. **Review** the text on slides **4** and **5** if you need help.

**1** Quiet workplace with glass-enclosed offices.

**2** Informal meetings.

**3** Much less hierarchy and formality.

**4** Flexible working hours.

**5** Expected to wear business attire.

**6** Pet-friendly office.

**Formal British Bank**

**German Startup Office**



# Discuss

**Answer** the questions below.

**What do you do when you feel disoriented?**



**Would you like to work in a pet-friendly office? Why or why not?**

**Have you, or anyone that you know, ever experienced re-entry shock?**



# Discuss

**Answer** the question below.

**If you could work from any country in the world, which country would you choose and why?**

**Share you answer with the rest of the class!**



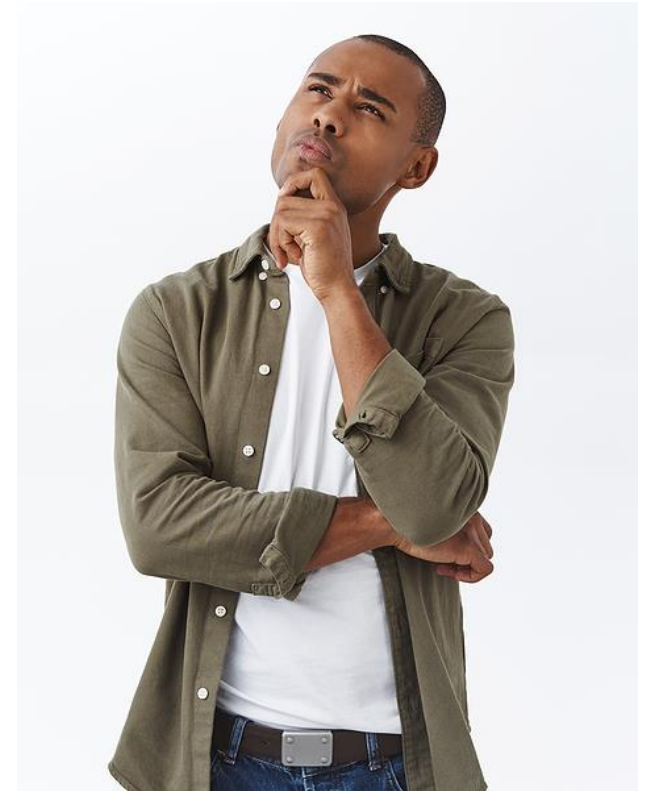


# Re-entry advice

**Read** the scenario below.

**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.**

**Compare your advice with the rest of the class.**





# Answer key

**P.7:** 1.) d 2.) a 3.) e 4.) c 5.) b

**P.8:**

enclosed, unanticipated

up to speed

disoriented

**P.9:** Feeling disoriented in my home country

**P.10:** 1.) false 2.) true 3.) false 4.) false 5.) false

**P.15:**

nerves

disoriented

up to speed

social norms

**P.16:**

*Formal British Bank: 1, 5*

*German Start-up: 2, 3, 4, 6*





# Summary

## Exploring culture shock

- *up to speed; unanticipated; nerves; enclosed; social norms; to expand*
- *I wanted to **expand** my intercultural awareness.*
- *I quickly got **up to speed** on start-up culture in Berlin.*

## Re-entry shock

- A person can experience **re-entry shock** when they return to their home country after having been abroad for a period of time.
- **Re-entry shock** may include **feeling disoriented**, a sense of **disconnect** with old colleagues and friends, and the feeling that others don't understand why you'd left in the first place.

## Different workplaces

- Some workplaces are more **formal** and can include: enclosed offices, a formal dress code, and workplace hierarchy.
- Some workplaces, such as **start-ups**, are **less formal** and can include: informal meetings, a pet-friendly office, flexible working hours, and an open office plan.



# Vocabulary

up to speed

unanticipated

nerves

enclosed

social norms

to expand

