

Chapter 2

Cultural Frameworks: Understanding Differences in Employee Attitudes and Behavior

Chapter Activities

Developing Your International Career: What Are Your Attitudes Toward Individualism and Collectivism?

Purpose and Instructions

The goal of this exercise is to promote an enhanced understanding and grasp of your own attitudes about individualism and collectivism. First, assume that you are somewhere in North America and that you desire an outstanding career in a U.S. or Canadian multinational. Next, answer the questions that follow regarding your behavior in the workplace, placing the appropriate number from the scale next to each question.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree

1. ____ I would offer my seat in a bus to my supervisor.
2. ____ I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people.
3. ____ I enjoy developing long-term relationships among the people with whom I work.
4. ____ I am very modest when talking about my own accomplishments.
5. ____ When I give gifts to people whose cooperation I need in my work, I feel I am indulging in questionable behavior.
6. ____ If I want my subordinate to perform a task, I tell the person that my superiors want me to get that task done.
7. ____ I prefer to give opinions that will help people save face rather than give a statement of the truth.
8. ____ I say "No" directly when I have to.
9. ____ To increase sales, I'd announce that the individual salesperson with the highest sales would be given the "Distinguished Salesperson" award.
10. ____ I enjoy being emotionally close to the people with whom I work.

11. ____ It is important to develop a network of people in my community who can help me when I have tasks to accomplish.
12. ____ I enjoy feeling that I am looked upon as equal in worth to my superiors.
13. ____ I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact.
14. ____ If I want a person to perform a certain task, I try to show how the task will benefit others in the person's group.

Next, imagine that you are working in one of the following countries. Pick the country about which you have the most overall knowledge (e.g., thanks to overseas experience, reading, having friends or relatives from that country, classes that you have taken, and so on).

Argentina

Brazil

China

Greece

India

Italy

Japan

Mexico

Peru

Philippines

Spain

Taiwan

Thailand

Turkey

Venezuela

Now go back and answer the same 14 questions listed previously while imagining that you are working in the country you picked from the list. Imagine that you will be living in that country for a long period of time and want to have a good career in a corporation there. Use the same 5-point scale that you used before.

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. ____ | 8. ____ |
| 2. ____ | 9. ____ |
| 3. ____ | 10. ____ |
| 4. ____ | 11. ____ |
| 5. ____ | 12. ____ |
| 6. ____ | 13. ____ |
| 7. ____ | 14. ____ |

Scoring

Scoring this exercise involves comparing two sets of numbers—your set of numbers for a career in North America and your set for a career in one of the other listed countries.

Let's call the first time you answered the questions the "first pass" and the other time the "second pass." In scoring, give yourself 1 point according to the following guidelines.

Give yourself a point if . . .

- Question 1: your number in the second pass is higher than in the first pass.
- Question 2: your number in the first pass is higher than in the second pass.
- Question 3: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 4: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 5: your number is higher in the first pass.
- Question 6: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 7: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 8: your number is higher in the first pass.
- Question 9: your number is higher in the first pass.
- Question 10: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 11: your number is higher in the first pass.
- Question 12: your number is higher in the first pass.
- Question 13: your number is higher in the second pass.
- Question 14: your number is higher in the second pass.

If your total score was 6 points or more, you are sensitive to the cultural differences captured by the concepts of individualism and collectivism. You grasp that cultures that embrace individualism may require different behaviors to accomplish goals and to achieve career success than cultures that embrace collectivism.

Source: Brislin, R. W., & Yoshida, T. (Eds.), Improving intercultural interactions: Modules for cross-cultural training programs. Copyright © 1994 by Sage Publications. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

Making the Case for International Understanding: Is a Culture of Entrepreneurial Problem-Solving Key for India?

India is a complex and chaotic place with hundreds of millions of poor citizens and a ramshackle infrastructure—particularly when compared to the gleaming new ports, highways, and airports that China has been building in recent years. Moreover, India has long been plagued by a notoriously inefficient, albeit democratic, government. But these challenges and barriers have arguably produced something remarkable—a problem-solving mentality that helps many Indians quickly, cheaply, and cleverly invent new products and new ways of doing things.

Indeed, this mentality has caused multinationals the world over to flock to India, not just for backroom outsourcing but to tap some of the most innovative minds in the world. As a result, optimists are saying that India today is booming in many respects, with a variety of world-class firms like Tata Motors and mobile phone provider Bharti Airtel. Not surprisingly, they predict that India's GDP growth will pass China's in a few years. And by 2015, some estimate that another 460 million Indians will join the ranks of the middle class, bringing spending power with them. Small wonder that some predict that India, not

China, will be the fastest growing big country in the world for the next quarter of a century. Interestingly, while China's approach to growth has been, for the most part, government driven, India's successes are more connected to the collective efforts of its nearly 50 million entrepreneurs. The unleashing of India's underlying entrepreneurial culture has been driven by several factors, including reforms that started 20 years ago (e.g., lower tariffs, friendlier rules for investment, and less business red tape). Another factor is the domestic market. While many Indian companies do a brisk export business in services, the local market is large and demanding, with customers wanting cheap products that work well from the start. And India's "frugal innovators" provide them what they want. In fact, some of what they have come up with is nothing short of mind boggling. For instance, Tata Chemicals has developed a water filter that costs less than \$1.00, needs no power, and provides 30 days of pure drinking water for a five-person family. And Indian scientists have developed a new laptop they hope to bring to market—one that costs just \$35!

All of this is consistent with recent research about cultural values that seem to encourage entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs function in a social context, and consequently societal culture can play a role in inhibiting or enhancing the entrepreneurial problem solving seen in India today. Specifically, cultural values that encourage helpfulness, cooperation, relationship building, and bootstrapping—particularly as mechanisms for overcoming obstacles in society—seem to help spur entrepreneurial innovation. And India generally scores high on these attributes—on what GLOBE refers to as "humane orientation."

Likewise, India scores highly on in-group collectivism, where strong family connections and ties dominate and define India's most prominent and entrepreneurial companies. Moreover, when entrepreneurship is touted as being socially desirable in a country, it can, over time, strengthen and support cultural values that encourage entrepreneurial activity. But, as stated earlier, India is a complex place, one with plenty of built-in contradictions. Because of bureaucratic barriers and increasing domestic competition, some of India's best companies, such as Godrej Consumer Products, are looking abroad to places like Africa to grow their revenues—where their efficient and inexpensive business models are well suited to create products tailored to local demands. Indeed, many companies feel that India remains a very challenging place to do business. Many Indian roads are abysmal and some are slowed by checkpoints where officials demand bribes from truck drivers. Likewise, companies often must maintain their own backup power and sanitation systems given the lack of stable utilities. Moreover, while India has plenty of innovative entrepreneurs, it is woefully short on engineers and other trained professionals, has too few outstanding universities, and has a weak primary education system. The government is also somewhat unpredictable and laws are routinely challenged in court, making it difficult for businesses to know what will happen next. One Western businessman noted that China was much easier to operate in compared to "the freewheeling chaos of India."

The big question, of course, is whether India's cultural support for its unique, problem-solving "frugal innovators" can continue to lift the country up faster and farther than its

challenges and weaknesses hold it back. Will the optimists or the pessimists be right in the end about India? What do you think?

Assignment Questions

1. Do an in-depth assessment of Indian culture. What specific elements of that culture support entrepreneurship? Are there elements that hinder it? Can you provide examples of how these cultural elements are manifested in successful Indian firms as well as firms that have struggled recently?
2. As an international manager for a foreign multinational, how would you try to make sense of and adapt to the Indian business and cultural environment if you were doing business there? How might you be able to take advantage of India's expertise in "frugal innovation"?
3. Overall, do you side with the optimists who believe that India's culture will help it leapfrog China in the next few decades or the pessimists who see India as facing daunting problems that will hold its growth back for years to come? Either way, fully explain your position.