

High- and Low Context Cultures

“Always be careful, as they say,
'Text without context is usually pretext'.”

- Ted Mallory -



High- and Low Context Cultures

"One of the most effective ways to learn about oneself is by taking seriously the cultures of others. It forces you to pay attention to those details of life which differentiate them from you."

- Edward T. Hall -

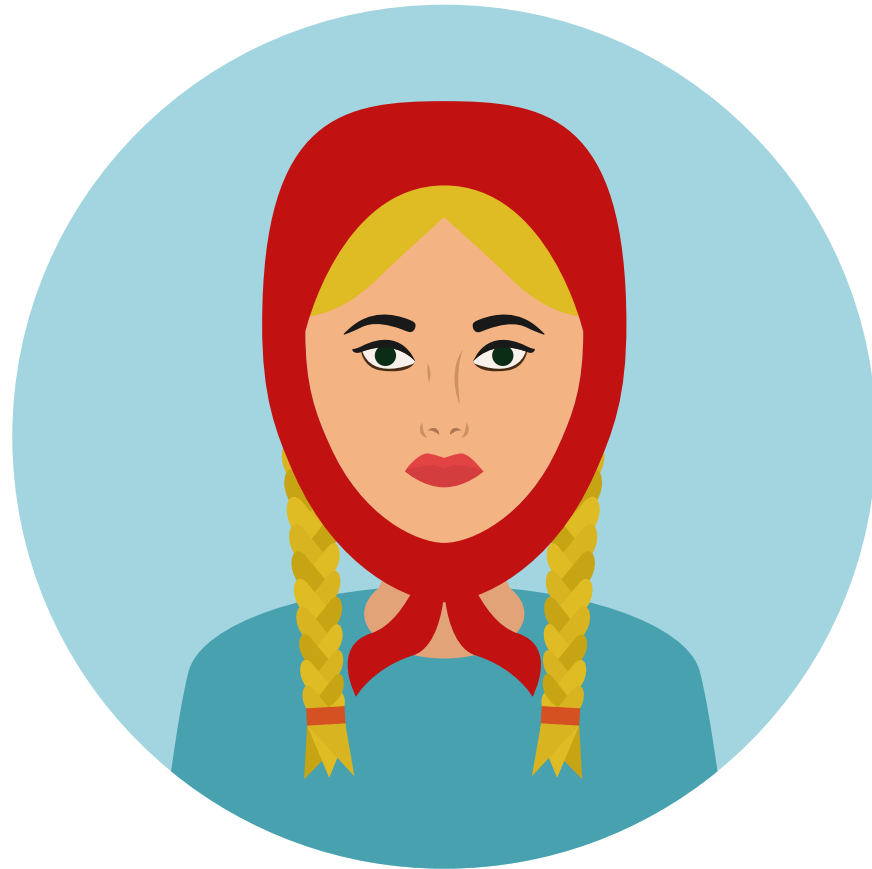
What do you value the most, a legal document or an informal agreement? Words you can hear or the meaning in what is not said? Is an Asian customer likely to appreciate your attempt to get straight to the point during a business meeting? How well do you understand your audience?



High- and Low Context Cultures

High Context Cultures:

Include (to varying extents and are not limited to) most Latin-American, Southern European, Asian and African countries, tribal communities around the world.



Low Context Cultures:

Include (to varying extents and are not limited to) Scandinavian countries, most English and German speaking countries.



Low Context Cultures



- Messages are explicit, direct, easily understandable by anyone
- The use of non-verbal communication is limited
- Written communication is common and relied on, contracts tend to be long and extremely detailed
- Decisions are made after evaluation of facts and data
- Rules and procedures are followed closely
- Learning occurs by following clear instructions and explanations of others
- Speed, efficiency and goal-orientation are valued

High Context Cultures



- Messages are implicit and indirect: context is more valuable than words
- The use of non-verbal communication (voice, gestures, etc) is significant
- Reliance on written communication is low: knowledge of "unwritten" rules tends to be assumed
- Decisions are based on feelings and emotional factors
- Rules and procedures are somewhat flexible. Relationships are the priority
- Learning occurs by observing first and then replicating
- Accuracy and thoroughness are valued

Sources

- Hall Edward T. (1959). The Silent Language. New York: Doubleday
- Hall Edward T. (1969). The Hidden Dimension. New York: Doubleday
- Hall Edward T. (1976). Beyond Culture. New York: Doubleday