

Connecting you with your (hidden) potential.

No Boundaries: *Intercultural communication*

Our society is becoming increasingly multicultural, with many different cultures living side by side. In our work, we also have progressively more dealings with business partners and colleagues from other countries and cultures. Because of mergers, increased internationalization and open borders, it is a given that communication in all aspects of life will become more and more interculturally orientated.

Houthoff, we also see an increase in requests for our expertise in the field of intercultural communication.

What is culture really?

Culture is the whole of matters we take for granted which determine the way we experience and understand our daily reality. It is the unspoken matters which are not debatable: these things just are the way they are! Think of the way we greet each other, make appointments, celebrate holidays and deal with our family. We only become conscious of our own culture when we are confronted with the traditions and customs of another culture. For instance, when we see two men walk arm in arm in the Netherlands, we associate this with sexuality, whereas in the Middle East, it is a very normal, non-sexual way to interact. In fact, they see it as awkward when a man and a woman walk arm in arm. However, you can also find cultural differences closer to home. You find them within your company: between departments, divisions and different offices. 'At our department, we settle such matters amongst ourselves without any problems, but at the head office, everything goes by the book.'

When we communicate with each other coming from different cultures, it is of paramount importance that we are conscious of the fact that the other's thoughts and actions



come from a different perspective and background than our own. If this awareness is missing and if we keep looking at matters only from our own frame of reference, the parties involved will soon suffer from mutual incomprehension. How do you solve miscommunication without putting yourself or the other at a disadvantage?

In our training Intercultural Communication, we do not give the participants a manual for dealing with *the Japanese*, *the Kazakh* and *the Germans*. Everyone already knows the clichés: Dutch people talk according to the 'poldermodel', Germans are very

punctual and French take important decisions during long talks while eating out. Such clichés work affirmatively and keep people in check. And of course it is good to study the customs and traditions of the country you are dealing with before you go there on business (for more info, see further below: Doing business abroad in practice). But what do you do if you are chairing a meeting of a mixed company, such as a European or Asian meeting?

In its training, Houthoff offers an approach which you can use everywhere in the world: it is a generic approach. Curious? Then read on.



Linda Houthoff,
General Manager Houthoff Training & Coaching

You don't know what to expect...

Gerdy Heek (29) and Jeroen den Hollander (26) both work as consultants at LogicaCMG in Amstelveen. LogicaCMG is one of the largest international ICT-service providers in the Netherlands and is listed in the top-20 ICT companies of the world. The company offers ICT-solutions such as automating office processes and the digitalisation of documents.



Seeing as Gerdy and Jeroen wanted to work on a job abroad, they decided to follow the Intercultural Communication training at Houthoff prior to their departure. The training took two days and was tailor-made for LogicaCMG.

Jeroen: 'It was the first time for both of us that we went abroad for business. You don't really know what to expect of conversations with people from another culture. Do they treat each other the same as we do in The Netherlands or is everything different?'

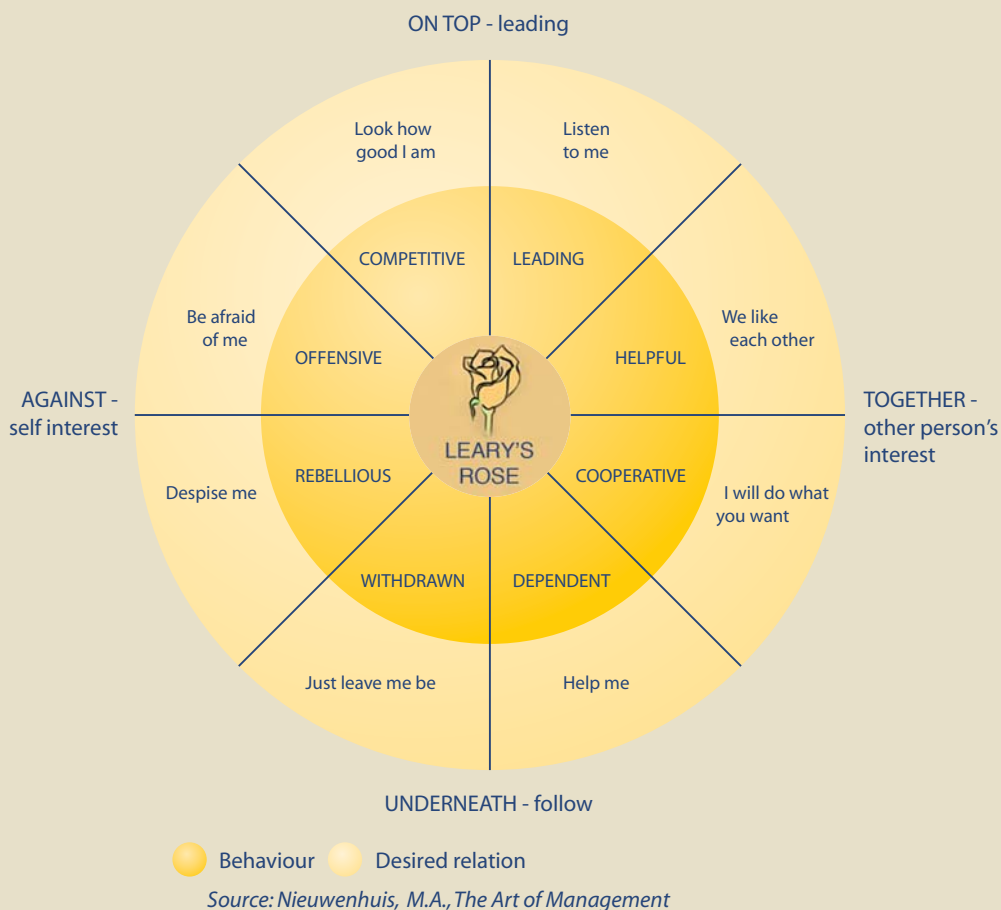
Gerdy and Jeroen each visited an office of ABN Amro: Gerdy in Moscow and Jeroen in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan. They went there to analyze the work processes of the bank and to check the possibility of digitalising the flow of paper. This stops employees from lugging around stacks of paper from one desk to the next, enabling them to check everything on the computer.

'What struck me in Moscow,' says Gerdy, 'is that there is much more of an emphasis on **hierarchy** in Russia than in The Netherlands. Whatever the boss says, happens. That makes it difficult to contradict him: you got to have what it takes and offer convincing arguments. My age did not make things easier. On the whole, things are a bit more formal.'

Jeroen: 'I instantly noticed something. Men shake each other's hands extensively at the beginning of the day and the same happens at the beginning of a meeting. My female colleague however, was not offered a hand by anyone. She later told me that this made her feel that as a woman, her status was lower. Later we saw that other female Kazakh employees offered their hand first and then shook hands just as heartily and friendly as the men did amongst themselves. Apparently, the initiative lies with the women. By being curious and studying their mannerisms, we soon found out what their customs were and that it was nothing personal.'



Jeroen den Hollander



Gerdy: 'Looking at your foreign conversational partner with an *open mind* and being aware of your own cultural customs and values. Those are the themes which are dealt with extensively during Houthoff's Intercultural Communication training. You cannot automatically assume that the culture in which you grew up and live in is the leading standard. Be curious about the other and do not be ashamed to ask questions when something is not clear. During the training, we dealt extensively with the question how you can best respond to foreign colleagues and clients. The focus was on practicing, from a theoretical perspective. Through role playing, but also with the Rose of Leary (see image), we gained a lot of insight into how you can switch between different patterns of behaviour. It increases your options and your communication repertoire. Our invisible backpack is filled with something extra: we know

how to increase our influence, also in an international setting. The training has helped us a lot and we have become much more aware of our own behaviour.'

Gerdy also added: 'When I was in Moscow, I did everything based on my emotions. On top of that,



Gerdy Heek

I was very watchful of the body language of my conversation partner. This enabled me to keep checking whether we understood each other correctly. Through the training, I went from consciously capable to more subconsciously capable.'

E-coaching and telecoaching

What is e-coaching and telecoaching?

Both the telephone and e-mail are ideal tools for when you have to make a quick decision and need a sounding board for your thoughts and ideas. Telecoaching is based on using the telephone for your questions, whereas e-coaching utilizes email. Asking for personal advice through email enables you to formulate your question in your own time. Your coach will answer your question within 24 hours on workdays. If you feel more comfortable with using the phone, or if the situation demands direct contact, it is possible to call your coach for an immediate expert advice. If your coach is otherwise engaged, we will make sure that he or she returns your phone call as soon as possible. Telecoaching or e-coaching can be a logical follow-up to a training when you feel you need some extra individual coaching, or as an add-on to your training after the face to face-part is completed. You will save travelling time, avoid rush hour traffic and you can ask your coach questions when it is most convenient for you. You will receive a swift reply, regardless of whether you (temporarily) work or live abroad.

Examples of topics for discussion

- Deliberating on making the best possible business decision;
- Clarifying a complex situation;
- Brainstorming on the best possible approach of a problem by discussing practical situations;
- Preparing a presentation or interview;
- Giving positive feedback on your performance;
- How to get more passion and inspiration;
- Getting more grip on any kind of change, like a new job, a reorganization, or a merger.

Advantages

- You can ask your coach questions at a time most convenient for you;
- You will save travelling time and avoid rush hour traffic;
- You will receive a swift reply;
- Regardless of whether you (temporarily) live or work abroad, you can use our services;
- You can call or email us from your own trusted environment;
- Telecoaching or e-coaching requires no special facilities.

For who?

Entrepreneurs, executives, managers, project supervisors and any employees all over the world. Many employees of international companies around the world use our services.

Procedure

There are two options: we can arrange an introductory interview by phone or we can introduce you to one of our coaches during a free and informal introduction. We believe it is very important that you can connect with your coach. We believe that a relationship based on trust is a prerogative for fruitful cooperation. If this is not the case, we will introduce you to another coach.

By means of a signed agreement you can use our services. The frequency with which you utilize our services is entirely up to you.

Do you have a webcam and a headset? Then Houthoff offers you the possibility of using our online conference software. This way you can talk with and see your coach through the internet. The software also provides you with a "whiteboard" through which you can write things down or show your presentation. All the information on the "whiteboard" is immediately visible for both parties. This way you can talk and share information in real time, making contact with your coach more personal and effective.

Information:

Are you interested in what e-coaching or telecoaching can do for you, your team or your organisation, then contact us on +31 (0)70 3623617.

Doing business abroad in practice. True or false? *



When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Every country has its customs, its do's and don'ts. Just so when it comes to doing business. Below are a few statements. Are they correct or incorrect? You can find the answer on our website, www.houthofftrainingen.nl, under the button "newsletter".



Qatar

It is not advisable to cross your legs while talking with a Qatari.



Germany

Personal matters are not relevant for German business relations.



Japan

You always hand over your business card with your right hand.



India

Shaking your head from side to side means yes in India, confirming what is being said.



Nigeria

Bringing a bottle of something to drink is customary when you are invited by Nigerian business relations.



Vietnam

A gift is preferably wrapped in shiny black or blue paper.



Iran

Iranians affirm something with a short nod downwards.



Tunisia

By constantly contacting your Tunisian business partner, you maintain your business relation and increase your chance of making business deals.



United States of America

Americans get to business straightaway.



South Korea

The kisaeng party is the perfect moment to present your new products.

* Source: EVD. The EVD is an agency which is a part of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and which supports entrepreneurs and public organisations in international entrepreneurialism



Building on trust moving together: Ingredients for intercultural communication A real-life case.

The Yente foundation organises trade missions and exchanges to developing countries and growing new economies. An important aspect in this is intercultural communication. Through proper mutual understanding, a basis of trust can be formed. And trust is an important condition for long term (business) contacts. But even if it clicks and there is a common goal, a whole range of things can still happen that are hard to understand. Letting go, taking a distance, humour, mildness and flexibility are the ingredients which are then used. The foundation has experienced this while organizing an incoming trade mission from South Africa to the Netherlands. For this trade mission, a workshop-day was organised in Breukelen. The workshop took four months to prepare. Eleven speakers were on the program, in two rounds of workshop sessions. More than fifty Dutch and nineteen South African entrepreneurs were to take part. On the night before the workshop day, the organisation was told the South African participants could not attend the workshop because they had to make an appearance at their own embassy in The Hague, as it was the 27th of April: Liberation Day. The people from Yente were faced with a dilemma, because the Dutch participants were coming from



When they received this news, the organisation went through the possibilities. What now? How could the foundation deal with this? Cancel the whole workshop? Go ahead with the workshop without the South African participants? The foreign entrepreneurs also faced a dilemma: they wanted to take part in the trade mission, but they also had to attend the Liberation Day party at their embassy. One thing was clear: Yente wanted to make the program equally inviting to both the Dutch and the South African entrepreneurs.

The organisation took a time-out and chose not to distance themselves from the South African participants, but rather to join them. A part of the Yente team travelled to The Hague to participate in the celebration. By doing this, Yente respected what was important to the South Africans. The foreign entrepreneurs promised they would join the workshop at the soonest possible moment.

The Dutch entrepreneurs who showed up for the workshop were informed. It was explained to them that in intercultural business, things can always

happen in a cultural context. They were asked to start the programme knowing that the South African entrepreneurs would join them as soon as possible. Everybody took the news very well and accepted the situation. In The Hague, it soon became clear how important Liberation Day was within the South

African culture and that the South Africans could not have skipped it. After the celebrations, they rushed to the workshop to take part in the second part of the planned trade activities. The South Africans were made very welcome and all parties involved saw the day as very successful.

The experience gained from this boils down to the following for both the organisation and the Dutch participants:

Take distance, let go and create space

The choice of the organisation to let the problem go, instead of wanting to take control, brought the necessary space to modify and reschedule the program.

Clear targets

Who are you catering for and what is best for them? This question made Yente's role clear, which was making the program as inviting as possible for all parties.

Creativity

Creativity is valuable when it comes to creating and putting into practice solutions and modifying the program, in close consultation with the parties involved.

Surpassing yourself, and thereby setting an example for others

By informing the Dutch entrepreneurs about the situation in a professional manner and by asking for their understanding, things remained calm.

Intercultural communication = learning, about others, but mostly about yourself. Will you take up that challenge?



all over the Netherlands, not just for the workshop, but also for meeting the foreign entrepreneurs. The workshop day seemed doomed to fail.

BE A TOI!



Introducing Lucia Looijestijn, trainer
intercultural communication

A while ago, I was walking my two dogs on the beach at Scheveningen. I knew that this is prohibited because of the clearly visible signs "dogs prohibited" at the entrance to the beach. I decided to do it anyway. It was seven o' clock in the morning and there was nobody else on the beach. I always clean up after my dogs, so I didn't really see a problem.

After a very nice walk, I came back to the entrance. Suddenly a police car appeared on the beach. The car stopped right in front of me. I kindly greeted the police officers and was very surprised when they stopped me. 'Miss, didn't you see the signs?'

'Yes, I saw them, but I thought...'

'We're going to have to write you a ticket.'

I got a whole lecture on what I did wrong and I tried to convince them that, in fairness, this was nonsense. When I realised it wasn't working, I accepted the ticket. After all, I had a nice morning stroll and thought oh well, I knew I was taking a risk. I wished them a nice day and they responded by saying: 'We're sorry miss, but it's our job.' I understood. No offence taken.

Hofstede

This is a magnificent example of a cultural manifestation that fits the theory of Geert Hofstede (professor in Comparative Culture studies and International Management at the University of Maastricht). He introduces a structure that describes the differences in people, as a basis for mutual understanding.

He assumes that national cultures can be divided into five dimensions or values:

- distance of power: the extent to which power is divided
- individualism: operating more as a person or more as a group
- masculinity: the degree to which the "male" component dominates a society
- avoiding insecurity: the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations
- long term orientation: the importance which is put on aspiring to certain virtues which will be rewarded in the future

The incident on the beach described above can happen in a country where the *distance of power* is relatively small: I respect the authority of the police

and can dispute their decision. The Netherlands scores high when it comes to *individualism*, which causes me to follow the law according to my own judgment. The rules have to be logical, and if they're not, you can break them. However, this also means that when princess Máxima breaks the rules, she receives the same treatment as everybody else! Dutch people dislike making distinctions based on social class or function.

The fact that I can negotiate with the police and that they apologize has a lot to do with the fact that the Netherlands score low on *masculinity*: Conflicts are solved by compromises and negotiation. In Arabic countries for instance, the distance of power is much greater. People do not enter into a discussion with the police! Neither will the police lecture you. It is clear that a rule has been broken, so you receive punishment. By negotiating I had a chance of getting away with just a warning.

My Turkish neighbour (who has a dog) would have accepted the ticket without entering into a discussion with the police officer. She would have felt *insecure* and possibly discriminated against because of the situation. Out of respect for authority, she would most likely not have made any eye contact. The police might have taken this as aggression or a lack of interest. She might have experienced a lecture as a loss of face and in order to save her pride, she might have even denied ever walking there. She would most definitely pay the fine.

In this manner, the five dimensions of Hofstede can provide insight into communication with people from a different cultural background. However, do not use these dimensions as *the* manual, but more as a guideline.

Intercultural communication means to me: making contact with the other person, while I am extra sensitive to what happens between me and the other person. I realise that I look at the world from a different perspective than the other person. Am I curious enough to find out from which perspective the other person sees things?

Intercultural communication is mostly about inter-personal contacts: how we think, feel and act. It is influenced by all sorts of circumstances, like education, upbringing, religion, class, sex, and all kinds of experiences a person has in her or his life. Thoughts, feelings and actions are influenced by socialisation, which makes it impossible to see another person in terms of their ethnicity. There is a growing diversity in cultural backgrounds, not just abroad, but also in Dutch society.

If you really want to get to know the other, then it's important to want to see things from more than one

perspective, so not just from a country of origin, skin colour or religion. I don't want to be treated a certain way because of my sex or nationality either. We are so much more than our outward appearance or our place of residence.

The training

In my work with intercultural communication I mostly want to show that you have to come across as a TOI towards others: Truthful, Open and Inquisitive. This prevents communication based on prejudices and it yields the most information and the best meetings. In the training, I simulate such a situation by, for instance, creating a work situation in Kazakhstan.

Two participants receive a list of *do's* and *don'ts* in that country and they assume their role. Two other participants are not aware of this list and just go about their business as usual. This brings them into a strange situation. For instance, they soon discover that a woman withdraws her hand when they approach her and want to shake her hand. This makes them uncomfortable for a few moments, after which the same woman reaches out to shake their hand, introducing herself.

By observing the situation, participants can learn how people greet each other with respect in another country. Furthermore, you could also ask the other person: 'I notice that you do things differently, could you please explain the correct etiquette to me?' Or: 'I notice that something is going wrong, could you please explain your customs to me?'

In some countries people first discuss family, the country of origin, cultural highlights, etc. When this informal contact goes well, they will see this as the basis for doing business. I also let people discover this through role playing: when you do not show sincere interest in someone's private life or country, you cannot conduct proper business.

I also let the participants experience how it feels to be addressed because of one aspect of who you are or through a certain code of conduct people assume is necessary when talking to you. We also deal with what happens when you are in a conversation and have no eye for the other person's situation and are only focussing on your own goal.

In short, in a light-hearted way I try to let people experience cultural differences and invite people to let go of their prejudices. Be curious about other people!

A while ago I was at a buffet with a group of participants and asked for the vegetarian dish. The man behind me said he would like the same. I knew he was born in Morocco and realised that he does not eat meat because of his religion. He asked me why I am a vegetarian and we started talking: it turned out that we both dislike the bio-industry.





I am going to be the world champion!

By Peter van der Niet, operational manager at Houthoff and trainer/coach

Last June, I took part in a trade mission to South Africa for Human Capital Management & Skills Development. Amongst other things, I went to look at projects which Houthoff Training & Coaching, in collaboration with Plan to Event, offers to companies. As described last year in the autumn newsletter of 2006, Houthoff offers organisations the chance to combine a training or teambuilding in South Africa with taking part in projects to aid the local population. For instance, it is possible to help build houses in the townships. These houses replace the dangerous and tiny houses made of corrugated iron. It is also possible to do work at a wildlife preserve. As a team, you will join a ranger and perform work in wildlife-parks or on the water. Work will then consist of for instance recognizing and counting elephants or dolphins and recording their behaviour.

Appeal from Mapoch Ndebele Village

For Mapoch Ndebele Village, one of our projects, I hereby make an appeal for soccer boots. The village was founded in 1953 on the bare plains because the government at the time assigned areas outside the cities to "black" people.

When I visited the village, the inhabitants had just cleaned a piece of land: it was now free of glass shards, stones and bones from cows. This land was to become a soccer pitch. In 2010, the soccer world championship will be held in South Africa. The South African government, together with many companies, is busy putting the country on the map and preparing to give a proper welcome to all the soccer players and fans.

Just as in the Netherlands, many young boys (and girls) dream of becoming a famous soccer player and maybe even world champion. The villagers made goal posts out of small trees. As you can see on the team picture, nobody is wearing soccer boots. This is because they have to be careful with the pair of shoes they have, as they can only afford one pair of shoes or flip-flops.

I know that chances are good that you or your friends, family or colleagues have a few used soccer boots at home. In Mapoch Ndebele Village, they would be extremely happy if they could use these to fulfil their dream. This is why I am asking you to donate old soccer boots, -shirts, -pants, -socks, shinguards and goalie gloves (sizes from eight year old to adult). You can send them to us or drop them off at Houthoff Training & Coaching in Rijswijk. If you are not able to bring or send soccer equipment, we will gladly come and pick it up. And of course we will make sure that they will be given to the soccer players on this picture!

COLOFON

The newsletter is a publication by Houthoff Training & Coaching



Houthoff Training & Coaching

Van Vredenburgweg 170
2285 SE Rijswijk, The Netherlands
P.O. Box 1108
2280 CC Rijswijk, The Netherlands
Tel +31 (0)70 362 36 17
Fax +31 (0)70 362 39 17
E-mail info@houthofftrainingen.nl
Web www.houthofftrainingen.nl

Coördination
Linda Houthoff

Editor
Tekstbureau Patricia Kat

Design
De Brouwerij, ontwerp en vormgeving