



Culturoscope

70 questions to approach cross-cultural issues

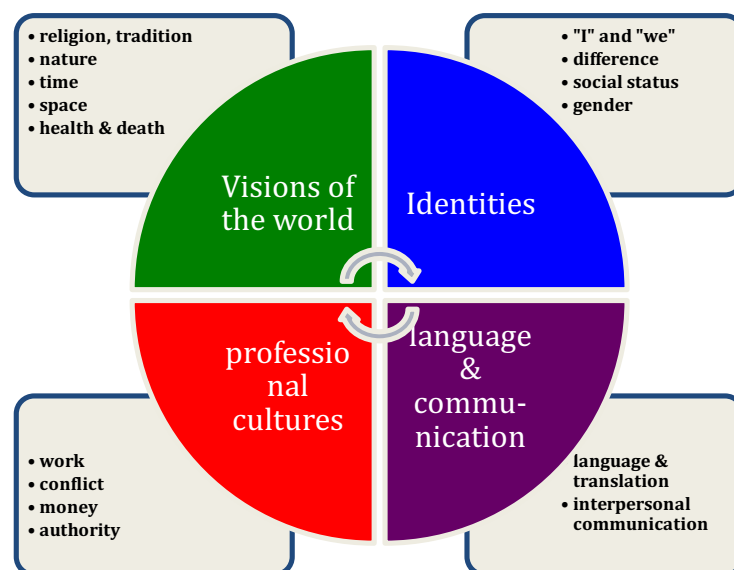
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Translated from French by Annick Manco²

Those who have chosen a career with mobility, taking them to a different country every other year or so, or who find themselves working in vastly multicultural environments cannot claim to be fully aware of the Other's culture. It is therefore useful in such situations to make a habit of considering a certain number of questions on the representations each and everyone may have of supposedly shared notions such as time, money, nature, and on their various *modus operandi*. What seems obvious to us may not be to the others.

The grid submitted below belongs to a set of support materials used in seminars held in various French universities or for training sessions for NGO staff members or volunteers. It is thus oriented towards managers or volunteers working abroad or, if in their own country, within a multicultural context. Its leading questions are designed, whenever a cooperation action, a commercial transaction, a scientific or technical debate hits on unexpected difficulties, to ask "where did it all go wrong? Where did the misunderstandings spring from?"

As they ask these questions, expats or professionals immersed in a multicultural environment may seek mediators, persons who, because of their life experience in the country, their mixed origins, the knowledge acquired astride two cultures, are in a position to explain where differences might have impacted.

The grid is not a questionnaire. It aims at underscoring the existence of similarities or differences in 4 main areas which can be considered when being immersed in situations of expatriation or involved in diversity management: 1. visions of the world ; 2. identity and human relations ; 3. Languages and communication ; 4. Professional cultures.



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This checklist aims to stimulate an enquiring and questioning attitude. Not on the assumption that “difference is everywhere”; the cross-cultural approach should not be restricted to the identification of problems. The Other is not to be confined to a vacuum to be filled or a problem to be solved, s/he is also and above all a learning opportunity. Cross-cultural dialogue is not to be reduced to transaction costs: it will enrich its practitioners.

All the questions of this grid are to be addressed not only with the relevant region’s geo-cultural factors in mind (region, ethnicity) but also:

- Its social categories and greater or lesser level of standard of life;
- Its professional status, the sector situation (business, public, civil society, etc.);
- And last but not least our own attitude: By the way, what are the answers produced by our culture to these questions? How would “walking in the Other’s moccasins” bring about a better knowledge and a finer analysis of our own responses and behavior? Can the “mirror effect” of this “Other-watching” exercise make us better aware of ourselves?

This grid is meant to be de-constructed and re-constructed according to needs. There can’t be many institutions, if any, where this checklist is valid as is. It is up to those concerned to come here with their own “shopping list”. All suggestions towards perfecting the general framework it represents are welcome.

Developments of most of the points in this grid are to be found in a book (so far, only in French) anyone will be soon able to download free of charge on the Éditions Charles Léopold Mayer website (<http://www.eclm.fr/ouvrage-367.html>)

- Michel Sauquet & Martin Vielajus - *L’intelligence interculturelle - 15 thèmes à explorer pour travailler au contact d’autres cultures*. Paris, Editions Charles Léopold Mayer 2014, 410 p., ISBN 978-2-84377-185-9

THEME 1: VISIONS OF TIME AND TIME MANAGEMENT

1 - Do our respective societies privilege rather a linear, or a cyclic vision of time?

- Do we overwhelmingly have a linear idea of time, as something ever in progress, somewhere between a beginning and an end (Judeo-Christian tradition)?
- Or do we have a cyclic, or spiral-like notion of time, whereby the dominant idea is that of an ever-repeated beginning, a renewal of things, as may be found in some Asian, African or Andean cultures?
- What are the consequences of these different visions, for example in terms of the greater or lesser acceptance of failure, or in terms of the notion of progress?

2 - Do we consider that time may be (or should be) mastered, planned, and sequenced?

- In our geographical or professional cultures, do individuals behave in a rather “polychronic” mode, with several tasks being conducted simultaneously, with little planning concern, even blurring the distinctions between personal and professional spheres?
- Or do individuals tend to distinguish clearly between tasks, in a rather “monochronic” mode, with methodical planning, priorities and a compartmentalization of private and professional spheres?
- Is our vision rather that of a “fixed time”, where time is a rare resource (to be mastered), or rather that of a “fluid time”, viewing time as a natural force to be adapted to?

3 - Does the dominant orientation, in our societies, tend to be long term or short term?

- Do our respective cultures incite us to delay our desires, to show perseverance and patience so as to enjoy greater benefits in the longer term, or do we tend to wish to satisfy needs more immediately? From our investments, do we expect short term or long-term rewards, or yields?
- To what degree is the uncertainty of the future accepted?

4 - In our cultures, how do we manage our work time, and the timing of our meetings, of our encounters with others?

- What practices are employed to govern working hours, and the patterns thereof?
- During a meeting, how is time organized? Do meetings begin with “priority” matters, so as to “avoid wasting time”, or are important matters worked up to gradually, towards the end, so as to leave time to establish a first dialogue in which human trust is gradually built up?
- What are the modes of response timing, with quick reactions or, on the contrary, with delayed reactions so as to allow referral to other parties etc.?
- Do we share a common idea of punctuality, of urgency?

5 - What non-cultural factors may explain differences in behaviour as regards time management?

- Can the precariousness of the environment or practical difficulties in moving about explain the non-compliance with timing, or time keeping, for example in appointments? Is this partly due to poor infrastructures, for example?
- Can differences in the ways time is managed be attributed to differences of professional specialities (engineers, traders, farmers, etc?)

THEME 2: RELATIONSHIP TO SPACE

6 - What are the different representations of territory, of frontiers and of mobility?

- Does the notion of territory refer to an area that is strictly delimited, as for sedentary populations, or to a space characterized by variable geography, as for diasporas, or to sacred symbols or places, as for nomads?
- Is mobility considered rather as an obstacle or as an opportunity?
- What are our respective “experiences of space”, that is, the stored memories of places and journeys which make up our mind-map of space?

7 - What are the reference points for general orientation in our respective cultures and the manner of drawing, or representing space?

- Are there, in the minds of our interlocutors, special rules which differ from our own, and which affect professional and social life, such as the rules of *feng shui* in Asia, whereby energies stemming from places and orientations are channelled, so as to improve the well-being of those living there?
- How is space represented, respectively? Does perspective, as we know it, have the same representation and meaning?

8 - What are the mental pictures of what is small or vast, of what is full, or void, of what is close, or distant?

- Is the void, or emptiness, similarly experienced as a lack, as an absence everywhere?
- Are representations of distance spontaneously bound up with measurements of length in terms of meters, kilometres, that is, quantified, or are they bound up with displacement time?

THEME 3: RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

9 - Do our societies privilege an attitude of domination with respect to nature, or on the contrary, of symbiosis?

- Do our interlocutors mostly consider man as “master and possessor of nature”? Do they regard themselves as being in a dominant position (“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it » in the Bible), giving them some special drawing rights over natural elements?
- Or do they hold Man to be an integral part, a partner with nature in a symbiosis between humankind and nature, between the visible and the invisible? (Symbiotic attitude)
- Is the distinction between dominating cultures and symbiotic cultures still relevant in today’s context? Is what is generally taken as an “ecological” perspective similar in all cultures?

10 - What are the different representations of the value soil or water in our respective cultures?

- Does land have a sacred value, linked to cosmogony or to the presence of ancestors, etc?
- What misunderstanding may appear, concerning the value of land (monetary or symbolic) when national and international transactions & negotiations take place (e.g. external massive land purchases, construction of large dams, diversion of rivers , etc.?)
- Does water have a sacred character for our interlocutors, resulting in a conflict between the secular, mercantile idea of water resource and the symbolic idea of water as a sacred element that should not be soiled?

11 - How do aesthetic concepts differ from one culture to another?

- What is considered beautiful, and what is considered ugly, in our respective cultures?
- Do colours have a special symbolic significance?

THEME 4: THE PLACE OF RELIGION, TRADITION & HISTORY IN CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

12 – Do our respective cultures tend to the sacred, or are they rather secular cultures?

- Is there an effort to seek rational explanations to most of life's phenomena, and is there a clear separation between religious beliefs and professional or public life (as found in secular cultures)?
- How far are the universe and creation contemplated in a dual way, taking into account both visible and invisible dimensions (as found in cultures organized around the sacred)?

13 – How does religion impact the daily life of individuals and of the organizations with which we interact?

- Is religion a state religion? What place and influence do religious authorities have?
- What are the manifestations of religious life within the public space, for example outward signs or the wearing of religious symbols, the place and importance of moments or premises set aside for prayer, the observance of bans on certain foods, and of periods of fasting (such as Ramadan, Shabbat or others)?
- What is the degree of recurrence of religious references in everyday language, for example in the way appointments times are expressed, or in daily expressions or sayings?
- As far as religion is concerned, is it acceptable to discuss openly, in public, or in an assembly?

14 – What is the hold of tradition on social or professional life?

- Are traditional values, like family, community, or honour deeply influential in professional behaviour or practices?
- To what degree are social exchanges ritualized, for example in banquets, in the giving and taking of presents? What is the place and significance of certain rites of passage, like initiation, coming of age, marriage or funerals? What are the expenses incurred by these?
- What is the role of protocol in social or professional exchanges?

15 – What is the influence of history and of political cultures on individual and collective representations and practices?

- What is the weight of historical political legacy (whether that of the monarchy, or dictatorships or revolutions) on the behaviour of citizens. What scars have armed conflicts or collective trauma left on the country, through, for example, the distrust of some communities, or nations?
- What are the possible sequels of colonization, or post-decolonization processes, in terms of personal or professional exchanges between ex-colonizing and ex-colonized powers?

THEME 5: THE RELATION TO THE BODY, TO SICKNESS AND DEATH

16 – How is the body viewed in our respective cultures?

- What may be considered as decent or indecent as far as body is concerned, what is considered obscene? What parts of the body must be hidden from view?
- To what extent is the body under our own control? Is the body totally our own?

17 - What personal space – “bubble” , what inviolate sphere do we establish between “us” and “others”? What is the usual perception of intimacy?

- What “ critical distances” do individuals respect, in different cultures, according to the kind of people in presence?
- What is the general view about intimacy, and how is this intimacy protected? In public spaces, what is the attitude towards physical closeness?

18 - How are the causes of physical suffering and sickness viewed, and with which consequences?

- What are the different manners of detecting and naming sickness?
- Are certain non-medical causes attributed to sickness or to suffering: like natural causes, or supernatural causes (punishment, or the evil eye, or curses?)? Or are certain social causes involved, like violation of social norms or infringement of taboos, or punishment for trespassing social norms?

19 - How do individuals find their way in the midst of the different medical knowledge and practices available in the respective cultures?

- What systems of scientific medical knowledge prevail? Are the methods those of Western biomedical medicine, or more traditional medicine, like Chinese medicine, or Indian Ayurvedic knowledge, plant knowledge, or African style traditional divination and interpretation?
- Is there a particular view of what is scientific, objective and reliable, or not?
- How is superstition viewed, and is it defined as a belief not based on verifiable fact? Or does it have the legitimacy of some special transcendental meaning?
- What are the various “therapeutic paths” that may be followed – for example successive resorting to various medical authorities, in the patients’ search for healing? Does Western medicine come last of all?
- What is the attitude to birth control?

20 - Is sickness an individual concern, or rather a collective matter?

- What are the signs that reflect the individual or the collective dimensions of health issues? Do patients tend to consult individually or accompanied? Is it the same for women and for men? In deciding whether or not to follow a particular treatment, are they alone or with someone, or are they possibly influenced by the community?
- Is the disease involved recognized as such by the community? Is there a “social perception” of the disease?
- Does the sickness have a negative social impact on the status of the patient, debasing his/her stance or causing ostracizing?

21 - What are prevailing attitudes towards death?

- What is the place given to the deceased in our societies? To what extent can they be considered to be still present in the daily life of the community?
- How are the dead celebrated, remembered and honoured? Are they frequently referred to, or mentioned as role models?
- How is death itself celebrated? What type of contact can we have with the dead, may he/she be seen, or touched, or displaced?
- Is death itself seen as a complete break, or is it somehow seen as part of a continuum, as a transforming process that extends beyond physical, or medical death?
- What is the significance given to the rituals that accompany death and mourning?

THEME 6: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE DIMENSIONS: "I", "WE" AND "THEY"

22 – Cultures of the “ I” and of the “ we”/ “us”: are our interlocutors principally oriented towards the individual perspective or towards the collective one?

- Does my interlocutor have a certain resistance to speaking in the first person singular, that is to say, as “ I”?
- To what extent can an individual realize his/her own potential independently of the community?
- Does belonging to a community manifest itself by visible markers of this identity?
- What “reference groups” or role models do individuals identify with? Do they feel in some way connected to these reference communities? How do the various reference communities co exist in the mind-set of individuals and do they sometimes contradict each other?

23 – What is the relationship to the family, to the community? How does it reflect the greater or lesser individualism within a given society?

- What is meant by “the family”, and what are its boundaries, its contours? Is it a nuclear, or an enlarged family? Do different generations co-habit?
- Has the weight of the family a major influence on economic and social behaviour? On the choice of a profession? On the right to travel or move somewhere else?

24 – To what extent does the balance between the individual and the collective affect the way decisions are taken?

- Within organizations, does official representation take an individual or a collective form? Is it considered normal for a single individual, albeit mandated by his/her institution, to represent the larger body?
- What is the level of autonomy that a negotiator enjoys with respect to the larger body he/she is meant to represent?
- In the public sphere, what are the prevailing models? Is individual citizenship prevalent over collective or community decisions?

25 – What is the relative balance between the individual and the collective entity when performance is being assessed?

- What is the place of individual assessment and individual reward?
- What is the place and role of individual sanctions?

THEME 7: HOW DIFFERENCES ARE VIEWED, AND EXPERIENCED

26 - What are the representations and the different attitudes with respect to ethnic diversity?

- What forms can racism take in our respective societies, and how visible is it?
- Has the country known major waves of migrations, or of ethnic mixing?
- What are the public strategies put in place for dealing with ethnic diversity, such as anti racist laws, positive discrimination?

27 – To what extent is religious diversity acknowledged in our respective societies?

- What is the official place and status given to religion? Is there a state religion? Or is the religious sphere kept separate?
- Is religion the affair of the private individual, and does he/she have to account for his/her behaviour to the wider community?

- Do public policies establish a particular religion as the main structuring force of public life? Is religion promoted, or on the contrary is it kept in the background?

28- What is the relationship between the sense of identity and openness to what is different?

- What are the reference communities that my interlocutor most willingly acknowledges, like family, or professional, educational or religious standards?
- How do these community influences minimize differences between members of an in-group, and on the other hand tend to magnify the differences with people outside the group?

THEME 8: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL STATUS AND PRESTIGE

29 - How are equality and inequality between people perceived? Is the society hierarchically strongly structured, or not?

- Do we have the same definition of equality and inequalities?
- Is social structure apparently rather unequal – with strong and visible differentiation between social categories, or a system of castes – or is it more egalitarian?
- What are the prevailing systems of social hierarchy in the mind of my interlocutor?

30 – Where does social status stem from? Is status inherited or acquired?

- In the various cultures, is social status acquired or earned, that is, based on an individual's own achievement, or is it bestowed by virtue of education, family, or social class?
- What impact does this have on the modes of organization and remuneration, within institutions?
- Does the fact that one occupies an important position in an institution imply that he/she should be able to answer any questions?

31 – What part does age play in the construction of social status?

- Do our respective cultures vigorously encourage respect for the elders, submission towards age, or do they on the other hand minimize generational gaps?

32 – How are qualifications & diplomas viewed, and what is their significance in the construction of professional status?

- What prevails, respectively in the selection of candidates for a job – between experience and diploma?
- Is the notion of “ executive” the same everywhere? Is a qualification/diploma sufficient to guarantee this status?

THEME 9: MASCULINE AND FEMININE, AND GENDER ISSUES

33 – What is the degree of equality/inequality between men and women in the country, and what is the state of the legislation in this matter?

- What is the balance between men and women when it comes to exercising political and economic power, in the access to the work market and in remuneration?
- What level of physical, sexual or psychological violence is used against women?

34 – In what way do the various societies give men and women different social roles in society?

- Are the relative social roles of each sex are clearly kept separate, or do they tend to overlap or at least do not contrast completely?

- Between one culture and the other, can women choose their social roles and professional status?
- What images are projected, concerning the couple or the family? Are the respective roles of the father and the mother (as regards for example, to children's education, purchases, budgeting, or administrative measures), strictly distributed? Is the difference between men and women made manifest in the different places/physical spaces attributed to them?
- What are the dress codes by which a culture builds up a visible separation between men and women? What parts of the woman's body must be hidden by clothing, whether it is the face, chest, feet, shoulders or others?

35 - What are the different representations/images of women in the different religions?

- How are women depicted in the various religious narratives and discourses? Does the religious argumentation occasionally lend credence or provide pretext to maintain an inequality of treatment between men and women?

36 - What is the cultural and religious attitude to persons of minority sexual orientation?

- What degree of acceptance or otherwise may be observed towards minority sexual orientations?
- On what cultural or religious arguments do these rest?

THEME 10: ATTITUDE TO WORK AND EFFICIENCY

37 - What is the degree of rules and regulations concerning work conditions in our respective areas?

- What is the degree of compliance with the ILO's international work legislation?
- What is the situation with respect to the work of children, or older people?
- At what age is one considered "old", "senior", or too old for the labour market?
- What place do Trade Unions have? What is their status and nature? What sort of actions are they involved in?

38 - What are the different mental pictures regarding work & profession

- What is the etymology of the word "work", in our respective languages, e.g. *trabificare* (torture), or "profit", or "accumulation of knowledge"...?
- Why should one work? What are the relative and respective motivations bound up with one's job – is it a question of accomplishing one's duty? Earning one's life? Or rather to progress socially? To be recognized? To establish and be part of a network of relationships? To realize one's potential? To emancipate?
- What present or past influence has religion had on these ideas, for example, is work seen as an obligation, or a kind of curse or punishment, as a result of the Fall, according to the Ancient Testament?

39 - What is the place of one's profession/"*métier*", and what is its link with one's dignity?

- Is one's job seen as a free choice, a vocation, or some assignment, where society or the family have a role?
- Is one's job seen as central to the acquisition of prestige, or individual honourability?
- How is this feeling of honourability expressed in exercising one's job?

40 - What are the various notions and definitions of efficiency?

- What is the exact definition of "efficiency" and "effectiveness" in the language of my interlocutor, and how is this idea put into practice?

- In our respective cultures, does efficiency principally consist in having control over all the different aspects of work, or is it rather to “go with the flow”, to work in harmony with time?

41 – What is the attitude to uncertainty, and to risk in the work sphere?

- Is my interlocutor’s attitude one of control, or fear, or uncertainty avoidance?
- To what extent is risk accepted, how far do people take risk?
- What influence do the economic and historical contexts have, in this relative acceptance of risk?

THEME 11: ATTITUDE TOWARDS DISAGREEMENT AND TO CONFLICT

42 - In our respective cultures, is disagreement expressed openly and directly?

- Are the cultures rather inclined to the implicit, or to the explicit?
- What is the exact meaning of a “yes”? Is “no” used readily, or are circumlocutions used preferably?
- Is it usual for one to raise one’s voice, in displeasure, at work, or is this frowned on, as a sign of uncontrolled anger?

43 – Are our respective cultures inclined to open confrontation or on the contrary, do these cultures avoid head-on clashes?

- To what strategies and postures does one resort, in case of conflict, in our geographical or professional cultures : favouring clash or domination, or on the contrary avoidance and by-passing? Is there a tendency to search for consensus or compromise? Is confrontation considered as always useful, or is there a general effort to avoid it?
- To what extent does the orientation towards individualism or, conversely, towards collectivism, tend to explain these strategies?
- How important is it to save face, or save honour and dignity, in the way conflicts are managed?

44 – What is the influence of religion and of history in the relative attitude to interpersonal conflicts?

- Even when religions officially proclaim incompatibility between faith and violence, do they extol fighting and confrontation, or do they advocate conciliation rather than fighting?
- In what way do history and political culture partly explain a greater or lesser inclination towards consensus?

45 – What types of measures are put in place to seek to regulate conflicts in the professional sphere?

- Aside of the legal systems, are there traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, like customary & religious bodies, or “joking alliances”/relationship in West Africa?
- Within the professional context, in what way do labour law or consultation strategies help to anticipate conflicts or help solve them?

THEME 12: RELATIONSHIP TO MONEY AND TO PROPERTY

46 – What are the place and role of money in our respective societies? What forms does “property” take?

- To what extent is society based on money transfers, and on the quantification of most things by means of money? What is the place, if any, of subsistence economy?
- What is the status of private property, and how is it esteemed?
- What forms of corruption may be observed, and how serious are they?

- How is “corruption” defined, and are there grey areas that are relatively accepted as not serious fraud?
- Which of the accumulation or the redistribution principle do our respective cultures favour?

47 – What does it mean to be “rich” or “poor”, in our respective cultures?

- Is wealth first and foremost appreciated in terms of money, or are there more important markers, such as social standing, social network, name, or family? Is the social inclusion/strong social link a key factor for one’s protection in case of problems?
- With respect to whom are wealth or poverty principally assessed?
- Who may be considered as outcast, or socially excluded, or marginalized?
- Can money be flaunted? Is it a natural and acceptable subject for social conversation? Do people readily say how much they earn? Are there practices where money is ostentatiously spent, or otherwise?

48 - What is the influence of religion where money or wealth are concerned?

- Do the religions that have a say, or interpretations thereof, tend to extol poverty, or otherwise? Do they tend to represent detaining money as a social responsibility which implies using it for productive investment and for sharing with others?
- How is one’s personal enrichment viewed?
- Is lending with interest allowed? Does religion have a say in the establishment of contracts, or in negotiations, or in setting calendars or financial deadlines?

THEME 13: ATTITUDES TO AUTHORITY, TO NORMS, KNOWLEDGE AND ORGANIZATION

49 – What is the attitude to rules in our respective cultures?

- To what extent do we have have a “universalist” outlook, whereby the same norms are accepted by all, and the same treatment applies to all, regardless of individual’s characteristics?
- Or, on the other hand, is there a preference for more individualized treatment, taking into account the specific relationship and circumstances in the application of rules? What is the balance between the general rule and individual treatment?
- To what degree is it acceptable to infringe rules?

50 – What is the attitude to contracts/written agreements?

- Is contract at the heart of the reciprocal commitment that binds people? Are there other means to materialize this bond?
- Or is the contract rather perceived as a means to guarantee the fluidity of relationships, and to protect one against uncertainty? Is it a means to build up trust? Or, is it on the contrary, a sign that there is little trust to start with?
- Is the contract seen as having to be very explicit and detailed, so as to take precautions against arbitrariness, or is it open to some interpretation, so as to be allowed to evolve?

51 – What are the mental pictures of authority, of hierarchy? To whom does one accept to obey?

- Is the prevailing vision of hierarchy rather a *social* one, that is, as flowing from a status or a position that may not be questioned? Is it an entity/scale to recourse to in case of conflict?
- Or is the prevailing vision rather of an *instrumental* nature, that is, based on precise tasks that have to be accomplished, defined pragmatically, and strictly dependent on competence and on the *ad hoc* needs of a group?
- How are the hierarchical functions of verification, control and sanctioning perceived in organizations?

52 – What is the situation with respect to power distance in organizations?

- How far is it acceptable to express disagreement with one's boss?
- To what extent are inequalities of treatment perceived as normal and thus accepted, between the top and bottom of the hierarchy? What are the external signs of hierarchy can be observed?
- What is the degree of independence between hierarchical levels?

53 – Is emphasis laid more on the individual, or on the tasks he/she has to carry out?

- How far do organizations take into account the personal dimensions of employees' life, such as housing, leisure time or family?
- Do organizations encourage commitment on a long term basis, for example by managing their employees' potential, training and careers?
- Does self-discipline prevail over group-discipline?

54 – What are the various sources of knowledge and mental images behind them?

- What is the status of "traditional" kinds of knowledge? Does this traditional knowledge stem from certain beliefs, or from experience? How is this knowledge transmitted?
- What are the usual means for knowledge to be handed down? Oral, written or digital?
- Concerning acceptance of one's lack of knowledge: is it possible for a manager to admit that he/she does not have all answers to questions? does he conceive is his/her role as a knowledge owner, or as a coordinator of the knowledge and competences of his team?
- What is the general perception of technological advances/progress – is it seen more as a constraint or as a liberation ?
- What is the prevailing view of education, and what qualifies as a *good* education in our various cultures?

THEME 14: INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE, ATTITUDES TO LANGUAGE, TRANSLATION

55 – In the geographical area where we live/work, what is the "language landscape" like?

- How many languages do our interlocutors speak, or understand? How many languages or dialects are regularly in use in their country? Is the norm to be bilingual, trilingual or more?
- What is for them the place of the "mother tongue"? What other language practices occur, like the use of pivot language (as is the case for English or French in some places)?

56 – Language and time: how are the present, the past and the future expressed?

- Do conjugations exist in the native language of our interlocutors? How distinct is the past tense, and is it readily used?
- How is the future handled and is it readily used?

57 – What are some of the special characteristics of the languages in use, and how do they influence ways of thinking and behaving?

- How does the degree of separateness of words, their composition, or the manner in which they are ordained in a sentence, or the existence or not definite & indefinite articles, etc. affect the modes of thinking?
- What is the influence of methods of writing – alphabetical, syllabic, logographic or through ideograms? Is the writing process from left to right, or right to left, or top down?

58 – Language and identity: what place does a language bestow on an individual, or on others?

- Is there a specific grammatical subject, and what place does it have in the sentence?
- What are the different uses of the various personal pronouns? To what extent those uses reveal conceptions of identity (more or less individual or collective)

- What are the respective roles of masculine or feminine, or neutral genders?

59 – What misunderstandings may arise from the phonetic characteristics of the language?

60 – What can lexical differences tell us about the reality of where we live and how the world is viewed?

- Where one word can mean several things in one language, is it similar in the other language?
- In what areas of the language is the vocabulary particularly rich, or otherwise? Does this reflect a particular tradition or intellectual concern?
- What are the unspoken system of values or shared experience behind particularly significant words? For example the word “honour”, or “believer”, or “profane”? What is lost in the translation of such words?
- What are the clusters of meanings, or the ambiguities hidden behind a word? Is a word really translated when it is rendered in the other language?

61 – What place is given to the translation in our world, and what is professional and social place of translators or interpreters?

- What is the role of the translator, and what is his status, in particular with respect to the community he/she belongs to? Is he seen as an ally or as a necessary evil?
- How are some of the “untranslatables” rendered, are they approximated, not translated at all, or is some inaccuracy tolerated, leaving some scope for personal interpretation?

THEME 15: COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

62 – Who is normally expected to speak to whom? Why, and in which context?

- When my interlocutor addresses me, is some wider community also speaking through him/her, like his ethnic group, his company, his church? When speaking to me, is he/she also talking to the entity I belong to, or just to me personally?
- Do the language registers change, from one culture to another, according to the person addressed, the sphere concerned, or some other circle, be it professional, public, friendly or intimate?

63 - What are the real stakes of “communication”?

- Is communication considered, in our respective cultures, as an information tool, a means of message transmission, or rather as a means to forge links and to contribute to some interpersonal harmony?
- Is the quality of the communication situation considered more significant than the information being exchanged?

64 – To express oneself freely, or to avoid it: notions and practices.

- What are the exact definition and contours of freedom of speech, in the professional and public spheres?
- What strategies are employed to exercise this freedom, and what limits exist?

65 – How are ideas developed, how is a discussion planned and what structure does it often take?

- How prolific is one usually with words, are discussions heated and lengthy as a rule? Is it OK to raise one’s voice and use gestures?
- In presenting an argument, is it common to start from theoretical premisses and then to proceed to action, in a deductive approach, or is it more common to start from concrete observations and then build up to theories, which is an inductive approach? In the structure of a dialogue, is there

a tendency to seek a preliminary agreement on wider principles, or to treat specific matters directly, so as to “move ahead”?

- Are people generally happy to talk about abstractions, as the French do in philosophical or political discussions, or do examples and practical considerations prevail?

66 – What are the different ways to take turns, to address others, to interrupt, or to take leave, in conversation?

- How do salutations take place, and starting with whom? What is the timing for these greetings? What gestures accompany this? Who has to be thanked, and how is this done?
- To what degree may one address one’s listener directly? Is it possible to look him/her directly in the eye? To make the discussion personal? What may be considered a “personal” question?
- What are the rules of polite conversation?
- When is it one’s turn to speak? Does one allow a brief, respectful silence, or not? What is the minimum pause for people not to feel one is interrupting? What is the maximum pause for people not to feel there is an embarrassing silence?

67 – In the respective cultures, what are the main codes and practices of non-verbal communication, like gestures, silences, paralinguistic or micro-signals?

- Whom is it permissible to look straight in the eye, and for how long? How is this interpreted?
- What space has to be respected between people, what are the rules of proxemics?
- What is the usual allowed time for eye contact? Is it different for men and women?
- Is silence regarded as acceptable, desirable, generally positive and respectful, or otherwise?
- How are paralinguistic signals interpreted, such as laughter, sobs, raising one’s voice?

68 – What is the role and significance of implicit information, as opposed to explicit information, in our communication modes?

- Are we in a low-context mode of communication, where little depends on the person giving the message, his/her status, his/her relationship with us, or on innuendoes, or on codes of politeness?
- Or are we in a high-context culture, where important information is conveyed by indirect means, and may be missed altogether unless one has similar systems of reference?

69 - What is the relative status of the written word, as opposed to oral exchanges, and which are mostly used?

- What are the usual modes of expression and what is customary in professional exchanges (oral/written, emails, telephone, social networks...)? What is perceived positively or otherwise?
- What degree of informality is tolerated in professional exchanges?
- Is the choice of communication channel largely left to the discretion of individuals, may they be combined, or are there strict rules concerning this?

70 – What are the permissible ways of expressing feelings?

- Is it easy to observe expressions of pleasure, displeasure, agreement or otherwise?
- Is it acceptable, or necessary, to smile? What is the meaning and frequency of smiles?
- How long is it normal to take for a bond of friendship to be established?