

Workplace

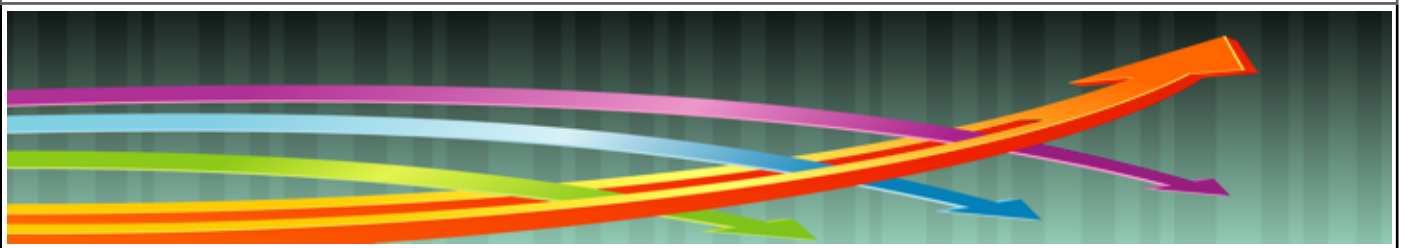
INTEGRATION

DESK REFERENCE for Newcomers to Canada



How To Close Communication, Cultural and Language Gaps in the Professional Workplace

Paul A. Holmes



Workplace Integration - A Desk Reference for Newcomers to Canada. 2013 Version

This resource equips internationally-educated professionals with tools for integration for their Canadian workplaces. It is part of a set of three learning resources that include a corresponding workbook, and a guide for mentors and managers who work with newcomers. The three texts build capacity and support for the workplace integration process.

The resources can be used independently for self-directed learning, or as an interdependent set in coaching/mentoring scenarios, training workshops, or related courses. They can be used in business organizations by employers, employees and trainers, or in educational settings such as schools, colleges or community agencies.

Alberta Human Services - Citizenship & Immigration Canada

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About the Writer

Paul Holmes, of *Anthony & Holmes Consulting*, designed and wrote the working drafts and produced the final document. He has a multi-faceted background that spans three continents and twenty years of working in language and intercultural contexts. He arrived in Canada from South Africa, via the UK, in 1997. He has collaborated extensively with newcomer workplace integration since 2004. He led and initiated pioneering projects with the federal and provincial governments with multiple industry partners. This included some of the first extensive company-wide work to equip English-speaking, Canadian-born employees to work effectively with newcomers to Canada. He has significant expertise in the domain of newcomer integration, having worked with more than 40 organizations in multiple sectors from energy, construction and manufacturing to public municipalities, law-enforcement, defense agencies, and provincial health authorities. He served as the Manager of Corporate Partnerships at the intercultural department for an Alberta-based college, leading the expansion of language and intercultural initiatives into the heart of the private sector. He has presented at numerous conferences, including the 2008 Alberta Congress Board. He holds a Master of Arts in International Relations. He resides in Calgary, Alberta, with his wife and two daughters. Paul continues to specialize in designing and delivering innovative solutions for the multicultural Canadian workplace.



“Workplace integration is the unique experience newcomers have of adapting their language, communication and other cultural behaviors to the norms of their Canadian workplaces, in order to fully contribute their expertise and achieve a meaningful sense of belonging in the Canadian workplace.”

“Integration is not assimilation. It happens by adding new norms, not by replacing all your existing norms. By adding new skills, behaviors and ways of thinking, you can relate better to each coworker. That means working well with both Canadians and those who come from the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and other parts of the world.”

What is Integration?

What are newcomers saying about the integration resources?

- “The integration resources summarize almost everything we need to know as newcomers to be successful in the workplace. I wish had this 7 years ago when I first landed.”
- “This is a really good resource for me as I am taking up the job that counts as my first beginning. I am implementing many of the suggestions in the resource and it works for me. There are so many things that are simple to Canadians but not obvious to me. The desk-reference helps me build rapport at work so I feel like I can belong easier.”
- “I think this small set of integration resources will put a newcomer ahead in Canada by at least one year from others who don’t get access to it.”

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List of Intercultural Resources for Further Reading

The intercultural theory in this desk reference uses and is supported by the following writers and resources:

- The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI): An Approach for Assessing and Building Intercultural Competence by Mitchell R. Hammer, Milton J. Bennett and Richard Wiseman
- Cultures and Organizations - Software of the Mind; Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede; McGraw-Hill Books, 2005.
- Managing Cultural Diversity in Technical Professions; Lionel Laroche; Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003.
- Communicating Across Cultures; Stella Ting-Toomey; The Guildford Press, 1999.
- Figuring Foreigners Out; Craig Storti; Intercultural Publishing - Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1999.



Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Why the term “desk reference”?** Desk references are short detailed texts that explain what is most important on a topic. In this case, it is workplace integration for newcomer professionals. Desk references are easily downloadable or printable, and can be stored on a desk for quick reference. The self-directed, self-explanatory design is a defining characteristic. They can be used in class as a learning resource, but they do not replace skilled trainers. Rather, they target the most common needs when training is not possible.
- 2. Who is the desk reference for?**
 - Newcomer professionals who will soon be employed in their fields of expertise.
 - Employed newcomers who have identified a need to understand the Canadian workplace better to achieve career growth.
 - Trainers who will use the desk reference as a core or supporting resource in their workshops or courses.
- 3. Who is a newcomer professional?** Newcomer professionals are recent immigrants to Canada working in a roles that require post-secondary education, in business contexts ranging from finance and accounting to engineering and other technical work to computers and information technology etc.
- 4. What is workplace integration?** Workplace integration is the unique experience newcomers have of adapting their language, communication and other cultural norms in order to fully contribute their expertise and achieve a meaningful sense of belonging in the Canadian workplace. Achieving this requires raising the awareness of differences in the workplace, as well as removing certain barriers. The best definition of workplace integration will ultimately come from the newcomer, because integration is both a highly personal journey and a shared social experience with other newcomers.
- 5. What kind of information does the desk reference include?** It gives the information you need about the Canadian workplace that you may otherwise never get a clear or sufficient answer on from anywhere else. It explains the most common employer expectations that are often unwritten and unspoken in an organization. All the suggestions and information are explained in this desk reference using strategies that other newcomers have used to integrate more quickly and easily into their own workplaces.
- 6. Where did the information come from?** Workplace integration, as a distinct subject of study, only gained attention in Canada in the early 2000s. This desk reference has been developed out of data collected between 2004 and 2011 from over 500 surveys and questionnaires, and hundreds of interviews, focus groups and training interactions with new and native-born Canadians across multiple business sectors. A 2010 pan-Canadian review of workplace language training clearly indicated that a list of “better practices” for integration needed to be collected into one training resource, available for anyone to use. The information in this desk-reference is current, but by no means exhaustive. Therefore, the desk reference is a departure point, best used in community, in conjunction with other resources whenever possible. As the field of integration studies grows, this desk reference will be replaced by better resources by more experts with more insights and richer experiences.
- 7. How do you know whether or not you need this?** You will likely already know some of the topics and issues in this desk reference. Reading through these will, at the very least, confirm your thoughts and give you more confidence. You will also find some information unfamiliar to you, not just in English or workplace communication, but also about Canada’s culturally-diverse workplace. Literally hundreds of new and native-born Canadians have invested their opinions and experiences on integration into the development of this desk reference. They believed that the lessons they had learned would support, and even accelerate, your workplace integration journey. At some point, a manual like this will be one of the first resources immigrants receive when they step off the airplane and present themselves at Canadian customs. Once you have most of the integration puzzle figured out, become a mentor to a newcomer who needs your help with workplace integration.



Guided Tour of the Features

This desk reference has features to help you grow in your understanding of workplace integration in Canada. This guided tour of the features tells you what to expect and how to get the most out of this resource.

<p>Principles</p> <p>The four principles divide the desk reference into four parts: Part 1 “Have a game plan”. Part 2, “Upgrade your communication skills”. Part 3, “Become really good at working with difference”. Part 4, “Master workplace English”.</p>	<p>Key Points</p> <p>This is the main point that summarizes the reading in one or two sentences. You can find them at the beginning of a reading, in the right column.</p>
<p>Sections</p> <p>Each of the four principles has two or three sections with readings and examples.</p>	<p>Culture Boxes</p> <p>Some cultural topics benefit from more explanation in a way that doesn’t disrupt the flow of the main reading. The boxes give you extra information on specific cultural issues to support your understanding of the main text.</p>
<p>Integration in Process - Case Studies</p> <p>At the start of each principle are short case studies about successful newcomers who demonstrated the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are explained in the principle. These case studies enable you to reflect on what happened, evaluate their responses, and decide what you would have done in a similar situation.</p>	<p>Unwritten Rules</p> <p>Unwritten Rules are the cultural behaviors in an organization. They are usually never written down, but they are unspoken rules. The ones in this desk reference were chosen because they are usually the ones that newcomers are unfamiliar with. Throughout the desk reference, you will find references to the the Unwritten Rules as UR#.</p>
<p>Readings</p> <p>Readings form the core of the desk reference. They explain the principles. Each section has a reading that gives the “what”, “why” and “how” of the main point.</p>	<p>Twenty-eight Articles</p> <p>The 28 articles in Part 2, which follows, are a quick reference to the rest of this resource. They are similar to a set of best practices for workplace integration. They have been categorized into day one, week one, month one and year one in your job.</p>



Twenty-eight Articles: the fundamentals of workplace integration for newcomers

Introduction to the twenty-eight articles

These twenty-eight articles are a summary of the information in Part 3 of this desk reference. The articles are your key “enabling skills” i.e. the non-technical skills that combine with your technical abilities to enable better career success in Canada.

The articles have been categorized into day one, week one, month one and year one in your job as a way for you to prioritize and remember them. Each article is like a best practice. Use them in your new Canadian workplace, but realize that no two workplaces are exactly the same. You need to adapt these articles as necessary. You are responsible for understanding the unwritten rules and culture of your workplace. Each of the articles tells you “what” to do to adapt to the new culture and language. Part 3, which will follow, goes into more detail on why and how to do it. Everything is intended to help you achieve career success and feel that you belong in the Canadian workplace in a more meaningful way.



Twenty-eight Articles

Fundamentals of Workplace Integration

The First Day

1. Have a game plan to adapt.

A game plan is a strategy that sports teams use before playing a game to help them win. You need a game plan to integrate into your Canadian workplace and find career success. It begins on day one. The most important part of that plan is to develop the right attitude - be flexible, be adaptive. Like anyone coming to work in a new country, you will need to make some changes to your thinking, communication and behaviors. You never have to replace your first language and culture, but you do need to add Canadian workplace culture to your skill set, and then use it. You also need to master English. Just because you have a job, doesn't mean you have enough English. You will be expected to grow with your company, and that will mean going through “seasons” of increasing your mastery of English. No one is going to tell you this. You will have to do it on your own. This desk reference is designed to raise your awareness quickly in the knowledge and skills most newcomers to Canada take years to learn. Leaving your first country to come to Canada was a big step; with this next step comes the responsibility to have a plan to adapt. See Principle 1 for more details.

2. Use a notebook.

Don't go to work without a notebook. Buy a good one and write everything down from instructions and new words to coworkers names and useful advice. Write down the questions you have in the day. When appropriate, don't be shy to ask if people will give you time to make notes. Ask them to repeat what they say, if you don't hear. Use the notebook for at least a year. Being able to learn your job quickly and remember information are two skills your employer will be watching for. It is part of building your credibility. See Box 1.5; UR#4, 6, 8; page 23 #2; and Principle 2 - Section 3 for more details.



3. Understand how credibility is built.

Credibility is the amount of respect and trust you have from your colleagues and clients. Everything you do, from day one will either increase or decrease your credibility. Many newcomers misunderstand where credibility comes from in the Canadian workplace. It is not from your technical skills; rather, credibility comes from a balance of technical and “enabling” skills (also called soft skills). Enabling skills are your “people” skills. Enabling skills are highly cultural, and will not be exactly the same as in your first culture. These 28 articles, together with Part 3 of the desk reference, are a summary of the most important enabling skills. Remember, technical skills may get you a job, but they constantly change with technology. Enabling skills, on the other hand, are constant, and they keep you employed over the long term. See Boxes 3.6; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 3.4; 3.7; and all 18 URs.

4. Ask when you don’t know.

Some newcomers don’t ask questions when they don’t understand. They don’t want to “lose face” (be embarrassed or lose respect) in front of coworkers and managers. They nod and say “yes, I understand”, even if they don’t. Then, they go away to figure it out by themselves, and up making mistakes that cost them their credibility or jobs. For some newcomers, this is the same cultural strategy they use in their first cultures. However, in the Canadian workplace, not asking is seen as being incompetent. Rather, ask questions because it shows your employer that you want to do the job correctly the first time. Employers expect questions. If you need to ask English speakers to repeat something, or to say it in an easier way, just ask. Canadians are patient and helpful. Remember, the only stupid question is the the question you keep asking, so use your notebook to write down the answers you know you will forget. See UR#4 and Boxes 3.4 and 4.1 for more details.

5. Be aware of non-verbals.

Non-verbal communication includes your body language like eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, touch and personal space, as well as the use of silence and noise. Cultures vary greatly in how they communicate non-verbally. When you are interacting with Canadians or other newcomers, be aware of their non-verbals, as well as your own. In particular, be aware of personal space and eye contact. Generally, people don’t touch each other during conversations. In Canada, holding eye contact with managers, coworkers and clients is essential to show you are listening. Keeping your eyes down, or not looking people in the eyes, gives the impression you are untrustworthy, disinterested, hiding something, or lacking confidence. But don’t stare too hard, too long, into a person’s eyes - break eye contact every 4 or 5 seconds. Look up, or to the side, as if you are remembering something. Take note of how Canadian coworkers make eye contact and use personal space. See Boxes 1.1; 1.2; 3.2; 3.3; 3.7 for more details.

The First Week

6. Culture hides. Find it.

As a newcomer, one of the worst things you can do is to assume this mistake: “As long as I act professionally at work, I don’t need to learn about cultural differences.” The problem is that “being professional” is culturally-defined. Being professional for Germans or Greeks is not the same as for the Chinese or Columbians or Canadians etc. Your plan should be to “find” the culture of your Canadian workplace. Most of that work will have to be done by you, not the Canadians you work with, because culture hides best from its own people. Canadians are like fish living in water; they don’t see their own culture because they are in it every day. But you are in a unique position as a newcomer - you are out of your first culture, looking in on a new culture with a plan to understand and adapt to it. Use this desk reference to raise your awareness of what you should be looking for. Then find it and adapt as necessary. See Boxes 1.1; 1.2; and Principles 2 and 3 for more details.

7. Avoid knee-jerk reactions.

Have you ever had the doctor tap your knee to check your reflexes? The knee automatically jerks forward. Don’t let your emotions and words jerk forward if you are frustrated with your new workplace culture. When someone says or does something that you find annoying or rude, the best thing to do is to take a mental step back. Suspend judgement. Look at the situation without emotion. Ask yourself “What’s up? Could it be a cultural thing?” Even if it really annoys you, suspend judgement. You might be offended where no offense was intended. It could be a cultural misunderstanding. Remember, you work in one of the most multicultural workforces in the world. See Box 1.4 and UR#16 for more details.



8. Adapt to how power works.

Power is the degree of influence and control a person has in the workplace. It is strongly influenced by culture. You can see power at work in the way supervisors and subordinates interact. You can hear how power is used in the Canadian communication style, which tends to be less confrontational. The Canadian workplace is less hierarchical than many other workplaces in the world. Sometimes, it is difficult to identify supervisors from their subordinates. Power rests in the balance between your technical and enabling skills. It is not automatically ascribed to you because of your role, seniority, experience, education, qualifications or responsibilities. Too many newcomers ignore this and end up working against the mainstream culture. Instead, keep up-to-date in your technical skills but aim to master the enabling skills, especially the Canadian communication style i.e being clear, coherent and concise, and using “softeners” to build consensus. See UR#14; Box 3.6; and Principle 3 - Section 4 for more details.

9. Stay on your organization’s clock.

You have an “internal clock” for how you use your time. It is both cultural and personal. Your organization also has a clock. It’s not just about being punctual. It means doing quality work within the project deadline. It includes how to schedule tasks, manage interruptions, set aside time for people, meet or extend deadlines. It even includes how long to explain something or give an update to your team. Look for the time patterns in your organization: punctuality, deadlines, interruptions, talking time, multitasking, productivity and quality. Adapt to the cultural, and stay on your organization’s clock. See UR#13 for details.

10. Know these things because no one else is going to tell you.

There are a few sensitive topics you need to be aware of. They are often culturally-defined differences that can lead to misunderstandings in the workplace. They may or may not apply to you, and are not meant to be offensive, only informative. Don’t sniff and swallow in public. Spit in the toilet quietly, never in the sink. Blow your nose into a facial tissue, never into the sink or toilet. Always flush the toilet and keep the seat clean. Make sure any female sanitary products are disposed of in the trash, not the toilet. Wash your hands and throw the towel into the designated trash can.

If you wash before prayer, work out the details of this process with your HR department so that it becomes integrated into typical washroom custom in the company. Religion is a fact of life in the workplace, but just like salaries and personal political views, religious beliefs are kept mostly private. Limited discussion on these topics helps colleagues avoid differences.

Unspoken rules exist around gift giving, although this does depend on the kind of relationship between people. Generally, giving your supervisor a gift or inviting your boss to your house for dinner is not encouraged. Neither is taking your team out for a meal and paying for everyone. Sometimes close work colleagues will take turns in buying each other lunch, but often people will buy their own lunches. Turn taking between colleagues to buy coffee is common, as is occasionally bringing in “treats” (e.g. cakes, chocolates, candy) and leaving them in the lunch room with a note telling people to enjoy the treats.

If you eat lots of garlic in your food, brush your teeth regularly at work. If you get bad breath easily, or have strong body odor from sweating or foods, find ways to minimize this. For example, if you cook with strong spices at home, close the doors to your closets to prevent the smell from entering the clothes you wear to work. Limit how much perfume or deodorant you use - some coworkers are allergic to these smells. Just try to smell neutral. Keep fingernails short and clean. Shave or keep your facial hair tidy. Keep your hair clean and tidy. Iron the clothes that people see. Dress similar to your peers at work. A few more suggestions - don’t wear white socks to work, keep your shirt tucked in and shoes clean, and keep jeans out of the office. All of these suggestions are in no way directed at any culture, gender or person. They are given as one newcomer to another. See Boxes 3.5; 3.10 and 3.11 for more details.

11. Use only English.

At work, speak English as much as possible. When you speak another language, unfamiliar to your colleagues, you create a low-trust environment. People want to be included in conversations. They don’t want to feel on the outside. English is the one language that everyone can understand. Having everyone speak English, so that no one is excluded, is the most common request by employers in a multicultural organization. Employers don’t expect perfect English; only that everyone tries to use English first. Sometimes you do need to take a break from English to rest your brain. But whenever possible, use English first. It is good for your career. See UR#s 17 and 18; and Principle 4 - Section 1 for more details.



12. Avoid the perfect grammar trap.

You don't need perfect grammar before you can speak confidently in the workplace. English-speaking Canadians will not be disappointed if your spoken English is not perfect. For writing, good grammar is important, but in speaking, there is more flexibility with grammar. It is more important to show you are trying to develop stronger English than keeping quiet. It is a myth that you first need perfect grammar to succeed. Speaking with confidence and using a Canadian communication style will be enough while you work at mastering English. See Box 4.2 and Principle 4 - Section 1 for more details.

13. Use initiative.

Initiative is the ability to assess the facts and options and then make your own decisions. In less hierarchical workplace cultures, like Canada's, your supervisor wants you to do as much as possible by yourself, instead of waiting to be told what to do. If you come from a more hierarchical workplace culture, you are probably used to being told what to do more than using your own initiative. Ask coworkers and supervisors when to use initiative and when to ask permission. Write down in your notebook whatever you learn about initiative and turn them into your habits. See Box 3.9 and all 18 URs as examples of using initiative.

14. Bring up problems asap.

If you experience a problem or make a mistake with serious effects on your work, you need to bring up the issue as soon as possible to your supervisor or team. Don't try to fix it by yourself, especially if you believe it is beyond your control. Don't try to hide it either. You don't "lose face" (lose credibility and respect in front of others) for making a mistake. You do "lose face" when you make the mistake again, if you deny it, or blame someone else, or don't catch the mistake in time. See UR#s 4 and 5; and Box 3.4 for more details.

15. Learn from your mistakes.

In the Canadian workplace, a mistake is usually seen as a valuable learning experience. Everyone makes mistakes, but smart people deal with them quickly and avoid making the same mistake again. Companies invest a lot of money and time in new employees, which means all employees are too valuable to lose because of mistakes, as long as they learn from them. As a newcomer, don't fight, deny or hide mistakes. Admit them and avoid them next time. Being able to admit errors and learn from them builds your credibility. See UR#s 5 and 6 for more details.

The First Month

16. Deal with coworker mistakes in the Canadian way.

Canadians tend to be indirect when pointing out other people's mistakes. For example, instead of saying something is wrong, they first find out why the person did it that way. They don't "tell" you what to do, but rather suggest specific changes or alternatives. The Canadian belief is that mistakes are lessons to learn, not problems to be hidden or denied. But, if possible, mistakes should be realized by the persons, instead of being told to them. Take note of the words (softeners) and tone Canadian coworkers choose to point out mistakes. Watch the body language and facial expressions used to talk about mistakes. They might be different to those your first language and culture. See UR# 7; Boxes 2.1 and 2.2; and Principle 2 - Section 2 for more details.



17. Use a Canadian communication style.

The Canadian communication style is made up of four building blocks: clarity, conciseness, coherence and consensus. Clarity means choosing the simplest words. Coherence means linear organization. It means putting the main point at the front, not the end. Conciseness means keeping information short. Consensus is the centerpiece to the Canadian communication style. It is the Canadian cultural approach to a variety of speech acts e.g. sharing ideas, disagreeing, pointing out and responding to mistakes. Consensus works through “softeners” - specific words and expressions which soften those speech acts. For example, using suggestion instead of opinion: “We could...” instead of “We must...”. This is integral to how Canadians communicate at work. Using speech that builds consensus is considered respectful and polite. It is the preferred Canadian approach for avoiding friction with other people. This aspect of Canadian communication can take time to master, but it is essential. See Principle 2 for more details.

18. Use intercultural communication.

You probably don't just work with Canadians. Most workplaces are very multicultural. You need to have a basic understanding of other cultural communication styles to avoid misunderstanding other newcomers. First, be aware that some cultures speak very directly, which can seem aggressive, while others are more indirect. Second, some talk in a straight line, to the point, and others talk around a topic, even going off topic. Third, some use lots of emotion in their voices, while others don't even show much emotion in their faces. Fourth, some keep their personal lives separate from work lives, while others talk a lot about their personal lives. Choose to use the Canadian communication style as much as possible since it is likely the main style in the workplace. See Principle 3 - Section 2 for more details.

19. Be prepared for meetings.

Before a meeting, have a rough outline of what you need to say. Bring your notebook, pen, and the agenda with any materials you need to print. Be ready to speak. Your ideas need to be organized in your head before you arrive. This requires a rough outline - bulleted points, key words and concepts, and notes, not a pre-written speech. The outline must enable you to be clear, coherent and concise. See Principle 2 - Section 3 and UR#8 for more details.

20. Speak up. Contribute. Participate.

Your employer expects you to speak up, using “softeners” in a Canadian communication style, when you disagree with important ideas, opinions and decisions. If a mistake is made, and your input could have avoided it, you will be held responsible. At most most team meetings, you are probably expected to contribute an update, idea, opinion etc. Your colleagues need and expect your input. If most other team members are contributing, then you probably have something you should contribute, even if it's just to say “Everything is going well”. Also, opportunities will open up for you to participate in workplace activities that are beyond your daily work duties e.g. volunteering in a fundraising campaign such as the United Way, going to a company BBQ. Take advantage of these opportunities to be more involved in your company. It is a great way to get to know people. See UR#s 9 to 11 for more details.

21. Maximize your day of small beginnings.

To “maximize” means to get the most advantage out of a situation. A “small beginning” is the first job in Canada that puts you in your career. You might not be employed at the level you were at in your previous country. This is the day of small beginnings that you need to maximize. Too many newcomers become discouraged and give up their first jobs too quickly. Don't waste this job opportunity because you feel you deserve a better job at a higher level. You do. But to get there you need to prove yourself here. A Canadian would have the same experience in your country, getting a job in your first language and culture. Focus on why the “day of small beginnings” is important - this job will be your first Canadian work reference, which will secure your next better job. See Principle 1 - Section 2 for more details.



The First Year

22. Use an evolving set of career expectations.

To evolve means to develop slowly, from simple to more complex. As a newcomer to Canada, it is important to set goals, but to let them change as you get more accurate information about the workplace. Don't set your expectations too high at the start - you need time to adapt to the language and culture. Don't set expectations too low - your employer will expect you to grow in your career, and skills. Set yourself specific goals for career and learning, but let them evolve as you discover new career information. See UR#2 for more details.

23. Seek feedback.

Comments from colleagues are essential to help you grow in your skills. This feedback can happen formally e.g. yearly performance reviews with your supervisor, or informally from coworkers and clients in the form of suggestions. Canadians tend to suggest more than "tell" you what to change. They will affirm what you did well before suggesting changes to what is not working. This is called the "feedback sandwich" - one good thing, one bad thing in the middle, and then more good things at the end. Therefore, if you expect very direct feedback on what you are doing wrong, you will likely not get it. You will have to ask for it. One way of seeking direct feedback is to ask the following way: what should I stop doing, start doing and keep doing? These questions make it easier for people to give you direct feedback without feeling uncomfortable. See Box 4.3; UR# 7; and Principle 2 - Section 2 for more details.

24. Master English.

Mastering English doesn't mean speaking English perfectly; rather, it means gaining control over English. You own it by taking responsibility for setting learning goals, finding learning strategies, staying motivated and rewarding yourself for growth. Your employer will expect you to be self-directed in learning English so that you can grow with the company. Once you are employed, set aside time outside of work for learning, even a few hours a week. If possible, combine classroom study with self-directed learning. Go online and find the schools, colleges and courses you need. Your company may offer in-house language, culture and integration training workshops. If not, suggest it. Or use this desk reference as your text book. Don't wait for someone else to do it for you. See Principle 4 - Section 1; and UR#s 17 and 18; and Box 4.2 for more details.

25. Clear your pronunciation.

Keep your accent. It is part of you. But clear in your pronunciation. Clear pronunciation does not mean you must assume a Canadian accent. Many English speakers emigrate from the US and UK every year. They never change their accents but they adjust some pronunciation to speak more clearly. The following three changes can make a big difference in your speech clarity in a short time. First, slow down your speaking speed a little. You don't have to speak fast to sound confident. Clarity will get you respect, not speed. Second, use short pause between your "thought groups" in a sentence. Thought groups are the way ideas, expressed as words, group together in chunks. Pause makes the mental process easier for listeners. Third, limit interjections: sounds like "um" or "ah", repeating words, making noises or laughing to your hide nervousness. They make it difficult to understand you. See Principle 4 - Section 2 for more details.



26. Become really good at working with difference.

The Canadian workplace is one of the most multicultural in the world. You not only work with different cultures, but also with different personality types, genders, first languages, backgrounds and experiences. You may not be used to working with different cultures or with people from the opposite gender. You might work with certain ethnic or social groups that were not given equal status in your first country. You may even come from one of those people groups. In the Canadian workplace, all that changes. For a very few newcomers, this mental and behavioral shift towards respect and equality for others can be challenging. Yet, it must be made. Respect in the workplace and equality between all people are building blocks in Canadian democracy. They have helped make multiculturalism and your integration possible. With strong English skills, and the right technical and enabling skills, career success is possible for anyone. See Principle 3 for more details.

27. Integrate. Don't isolate.

Belonging in the workplace is an essential part of integration. Yet, some newcomers tend to isolate themselves. They try to remain “invisible” in the workplace. They say nothing when others are talking. Coworkers take notice when newcomers isolate themselves or use their first language instead of English. They also notice when newcomers try to integrate. No one will ever say anything to you about this. It is your right to choose how you act at work, but it is also your responsibility to adapt and integrate. Career success is tied to integration, not to technical skills alone. See UR#s15 and 11 for more details.

28. Stay positive.

The most important skill you could have, but often the most difficult to practice, is to stay positive when you feel discouraged or frustrated. At times, you can feel culture shock or even “homesick”. It is quite common to experience emotional “ups” and “downs” as you journey through workplace integration. Everyone has their own way to get through these moments. Be aware of the one you use. You will need it at times to manage your feelings and motivation. As far as it depends on you, wear a “positive face” at work. Wear a smile and have an open friendly expression, even if it doesn't feel like your cultural norm. A friendly expression at work is one of the essential Canadian norms. Stay positive. You will look back three, five, ten and twenty years from today and understand so much more in hindsight. For now, take one day at a time, and keep putting one foot in front of the other in this journey of integration into Canada. See UR# 2 for details.

PART 3
Principle 1

Have a game plan



You need a “game plan” for workplace integration. A game plan is a strategy that sports teams create before competing in order to win. In the same way, you need an intentional plan to integrate into your Canadian workplace and find career success. Principle 1 starts by defining workplace integration. Then, it explores ways to maximize your first career opportunity in Canada. It also takes an in-depth look at developing both technical and non-technical skills.

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CASE STUDY

Integration in process

Carlos

Carlos immigrated to Canada from South America. He had a four-year undergraduate degree and ten years experience in his profession. Nevertheless, it was still difficult to find a job in his field. He could speak English but he often found it difficult to understand what others were saying in English. Moreover, every employer wanted “Canadian experience.” So Carlos decided to do a “survival job” as a security guard, and go back to university. Two years later, he finished a Masters degree in his field specializing in project management. His listening skills had also developed. A classmate told him about an entry-level position in an engineering company. Carlos applied and was offered the job.

Goals

Carlos’ main responsibility was to review engineering blueprints. He had to look for errors in calculations in the designs. The work was far below Carlos’ skill level, but the job was a “foot-in-the-door”, meaning it could lead to better opportunities. Carlos believed if he did well, better opportunities would open up for him in the company. After a few weeks, he had a good understanding of the company’s core business and which directions his career could follow. He set a short and a long-term goal: first, to go from reviewing blueprints to working on the project controls team within 6 months; and then to become project manager within 3 years. To achieve these goals, he knew he had to do two things: first, exceed his manager’s expectations in his current job; and second, close the language and cultural gaps he could feel were stopping his career progress.

Gaps

Carlos knew he was quick at finding errors in the blueprints but not good at telling his colleagues that they had made mistakes. Carlos needed more specific language training. He soon found out the company offered workplace integration training on Friday afternoons. The program included both English and intercultural training.

Carlos joined the pronunciation course which was very useful. As a native-Spanish speaker, he learnt to speak a little slower in English. He had to pause more often and put more emphasis on the p-t-k consonants at the end of words.

Motivation

However, he still felt very underutilized in his job. Some days he wanted to quit. But he stayed positive. He didn’t want to change companies and end up doing the same job. Instead, he looked forward to the training on Friday afternoons. He showed determination. During a coffee break, Carlos told the instructor that he was having trouble finding the right way to tell colleagues they needed to correct their mistakes. They came up with a great plan. That following Monday, Carlos asked the Canadian-born guys on his team if he could make notes on the words they used when pointing out mistakes to colleagues. Carlos began writing in his notebook everything he heard. Within a week he had identified the most common words and sentences his team mates used. He also asked them to give him feedback on his pronunciation and word choices. Carlos also wrote down other new terms he heard at work. His colleagues were glad to explain the new words to him when they had free time.

Recognition

Carlos’ team lead noticed he was trying to learn and be positive. Other team leads commented on Carlos’ attention to detail in his work with the blueprints. To show Carlos that other people noticed his efforts, the team lead organized five hours of one-on-one coaching for Carlos with a pronunciation instructor. It was very effective. Carlos thanked his team lead. He explained that he enjoyed working in the company. He asked whether they



could set up a meeting to discuss his career opportunities.

Looking Back on Small Beginnings

Carlos has been with the company for a few years. He is a senior project manager now. Many factors contributed to Carlos’ success, but a few important qualities stand out. Carlos had determination, or “staying power.” His first job was unchallenging so he created challenges for himself. He set specific goals and identified his learning needs. He took ownership of his learning by finding people and programs to support him. He showed gratitude for any opportunities that opened up for him. And when he felt the timing was right, he told his supervisor he wanted more challenging work. He asked for help in achieving it. This was possible because he had already exceeded people’s expectations. And he never complained that any job was too easy for him.

Today, Carlos volunteers in the company’s mentoring program, helping other newcomers with their “small beginnings.”

Section 1 Be clear on what integration is.

What is workplace integration?

Workplace integration is the unique experience newcomers have of adapting their communication and other cultural norms to the norms of the Canadian workplace. As newcomers, they adapt in order to fully contribute their expertise and achieve a meaningful sense of belonging in the Canadian workplace. A broader definition of workplace integration will ultimately come from you, the newcomer, because integration is a highly personal journey, as well as a shared social experience with other newcomers.



KEY POINT - Because workplace integration is a personal journey, it is also a puzzle only you can solve. This desk reference is a tool to assist you in putting the pieces together.

Why workplace integration is important

1. **Closing gaps.** To find career success, you need to close the cultural and language gaps that exists between you and your Canadian workplace. There are differences in expectations and behaviors between the Canadian workplace and your first culture and language. Once you are aware that there are differences, you will know where you should adapt. To adapt means adding certain new behaviors, and ways of communicating and thinking to your skills for working in this new culture.
2. **Avoiding misunderstandings.** When everyone follows workplace expectations, there are fewer misunderstandings. Workplace expectations are the general “norms”, or ways of speaking, thinking and behaving. They create predictability among people in the workplace. They apply to everyone, not just newcomers. In this desk reference, the Twenty-eight Articles, the readings, key points, boxes and unwritten rules are some of the most common workplace expectations, or norms. Some of them are easy to do. Some you will get used to. Others need to be learnt, and a few you may even disagree with. The norms you adapt to will ultimately depend on you, because only you are responsible for your career in Canada, not your employer, coworkers or community.

Return on Investment

The return for you, on the investment of your time (ROI), will be a smoother integration experience. By raising your awareness and skill level for working with language, cultural and communication differences, better opportunities will open for you that are unique to your future in the Canadian workplace. The practices in this desk reference have worked for more than a thousand other newcomers who contributed in various ways to its development.

How to think about workplace integration

1. **Integration happens as a two-way street** - Workplace integration differs from settlement which is the first few months in Canada when you find accommodation, schools, health care etc. It is also not economic integration - the process of “getting a job” in your career. Instead, workplace integration defines your “work life” once you are employed. It is often defined as the experience of a “good fit” between the newcomer and the organization. But the idea of a person being a “good fit” also applies to native-born Canadians. Every new employee experiences a period of adjustment in a new company. Therefore, workplace integration must have elements unique to newcomers. Generally, it is the specific cultural, language and communication changes that make the newcomer integration experience unique. These changes require a positive attitude, good resources and training, along with patience from everyone. That is why the Canadian government defines integration as a “two-way street”, or process, between newcomers and their new workplaces i.e an interactive relationship in which both groups give and take.

Section 1 Get clear on what integration is.

- 2. Integration means adapting, not assimilating** - You originate from a first language and culture that has certain norms that are different to the behaviors in your Canadian workplace. Adapting means adding new behaviors for integration, not replacing your existing ones, which is assimilation. Instead, you adapt by adjusting certain ways of communicating and working with people. You still keep the cultural norms you brought with you. Some will still work for you here because you work in a multicultural country. However, any norms that cause misunderstandings are not going to work. The choice to adapt - to add new ways for work - is entirely yours. New behaviors can hardly feel authentic unless you are free to make your own choices in your own time. This desk reference does assume you're ready to make some changes to how you do things now that you're in Canada.
- 3. Integration needs a departure point** - The readings, boxes and unwritten rules are departure points. There is no formula to Canadian workplace culture. No workplaces are exactly the same. Therefore, the information in this desk reference focuses on tendencies i.e. cultural norms that tend to be true most of the time. They raise your awareness of potential differences, and give you strategies, not scientific precision. A departure point allows you to start somewhere but grow as you encounter real life. This resource is meant to raise your awareness and help you to adapt quickly to the expectations in your specific team and workplace.
- 4. Integration requires cultural intelligence** - There is no universal workplace culture. It is not effective to think "as long as I act professionally, everything will be okay." This is because being professional is culturally defined. The Canadian workplace has its own set of expectations for being professional. Moreover, the Canadian workplace is very multicultural. You work with colleagues from many cultural backgrounds. They have diverse beliefs about how to communicate, distribute power, use time, build credibility or become friends. If there was such a thing as a global professional work culture, the Canadian government wouldn't invest money and time into training newcomers. In fact, the government also gives Canadian diplomats cultural and language training before they go overseas. You should plan to raise your own intercultural skills so that you can adapt to your new workplace. A lot depends on you being able to identify where and when you need to adapt. *The more your awareness is raised, the easier it is to know where and when to adapt.*

CULTURE BOX 1.1 Defining culture

What is culture? In simple terms, culture is a group's shared "norms" i.e. patterns of speaking, behaving and thinking in various situations. Culture can describe the people from a region, country, province, town, organization or even a team. Does everyone follow all those norms all the time? Probably not, so norms are more like tendencies i.e. the norms that tend to be true most of the time.

Moreover, cultural is only one dimension of every human being. Each person is more than their cultural background because they have unique identities and personal experiences. Therefore, cultural tendencies should be understood to other dimensions of diversity, such as personality, gender and age.

The Canadian professional workplace has a very specific culture. Think of moments in Canada when you felt offended or confused, or when you thought to yourself "we do things in a better way back in my country". Those moments were cultural differences. Don't stay caught between those two worlds - your first culture and your new workplace culture. Instead, accept that there are different, yet equally valid, ways of thinking and doing things. Get comfortable with the ambiguity. You can find a balance between both worlds.



Section 1 Get clear on what integration is.

5. **Integration occurs by mastering workplace English** - You don't have to learn everything within the English language. Mastery doesn't mean perfect grammar or knowing every English word. Instead, focus on the language that is essential to your career and to working well with coworkers and clients. A common error newcomers make once they are employed is to stop developing their English skills. They assume that because they have been hired, their English must seem good enough to their employer. However, employers have an unspoken expectation: if you are hired and your English is not strong, it is up to you to know that and to get the English you need. Most employers will support you. But the drive, the planning and choices must come from you. Once you are employed, mastering English for work will require some self-directed learning from you, and perhaps some formal workplace integration courses, depending on your needs. Make sure you find the space in your work-life balance for times of learning.

CULTURE BOX 1.2 Culture hides. Find it.

"Culture hides much more than it reveals," wrote Edward T. Hall, one of the first pioneers of intercultural studies. He also said culture hides best from its own participants. For example, Canadian workplace culture hides best from Canadians. People who grow up in a culture are like fish living in water. They don't see it because they are in it every day.

But, as a newcomer, you are going to be more aware of your own culture because you are now in a new one. You will also begin to "see" Canadian workplace culture because this desk reference is designed to raise your cultural awareness. As your eyes and ears are "opened" your intercultural skills will grow. But you have to take those skills into your workplace and use them. Culture hides. It is up to you to find it. It is part of integration.



CULTURE BOX 1.3 Tendencies and stereotypes

Statements about the cultural norms of a group of people are actually statements about tendencies. A tendency is a type behavior that can usually be expected from a cultural group. It is a generalization about behaviors. The behavior is usual for the people in that group, although it may be unusual to people outside the group. For example, a Canadian might give an opinion using a disclaimer like "I could be wrong, but I think the calculations in this financial statement are slightly off." A Western European might think the disclaimer is unusual, and unnecessary because the Canadian should have said nothing if he or she "could be wrong." For the Canadians, the disclaimer is a way to be less assertive. It creates an invitation for other people's opinions, or it lessens an awkward moment if the person has made an error. It has less to do with certainty or uncertainty and more to do with harmony between people. In a cultural group that values direct, explicit, fact-based communication, disclaimers seem unusual or even unprofessional. In the Canadian workplace, being overly direct is interpreted as too confrontational.

Cultural tendencies are not typical for everyone in a culture all the time. Cultures change between generations. In addition, personality types and other dimensions of human diversity need to be considered. Each person has unique qualities. Therefore, when discussing culture, it is best to talk in terms of tendencies. We think in tendencies in order to avoid creating stereotypes. Stereotypes are fixed, oversimplified ideas about a particular group of people. They are usually negative labels that lead to discrimination and the exclusion of people, whereas cultural tendencies are observable behaviors that are not fixed. Tendencies allow people to belong to a culture, but to express themselves individually as well.

Unwritten Rule # 1 Use an evolving set of career expectations

Recognize change is part of life. To evolve means to develop slowly, from simple to more complex. As a newcomer to Canada, it is important to set goals, but to let them change as you get more accurate information about the workplace. The world of work is changing rapidly. The speed of change is incredible. It is estimated that many professionals have had 10 to 14 jobs by their late thirties. One popular fact suggests that nowadays colleges across the world prepare students for jobs that don't exist yet, to use technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet. This fact suggests that people need to be open to learning and changing in their careers. Be open to opportunities that you may never have expected in your previous country.

Set accurate expectations. Some newcomers set their expectations too low. Maybe they feel their English is not good enough or that they can't match their skills to a job in their profession etc. They get defeated. They forget too quickly that the right opportunities always open up eventually. Other newcomers set their expectations too high. They want to be doing exactly what they did before they immigrated, even though they haven't closed their language, cultural and communication gaps. Some newcomers refuse to reenter their profession through unfamiliar opportunities. Others don't give a 100 percent to a "foot-in-the-door" job (their first work experience) because they feel the job is too easy or very repetitive. Meanwhile, the best career opportunities usually open up a few months into those "foot-in-the-door" jobs.

Let your expectations evolve. On the other hand, newcomers with an evolving set of expectations set specific goals for career and learning, but revise them as they discover new career information. They are willing to give 100 percent to any "foot-in-the-door" career opportunities. They spend their time well by mastering English for work, becoming culturally competent and gaining strong technical skills. Most importantly, newcomers with an evolving set of expectations patiently build that "can do" attitude that Canadians value. These newcomers don't lose the energy that made them immigrate from their first country to become Canadians.

"My greatest point is my persistence. I never give up in a match. No matter how down I am, I fight until the last ball. My list of matches shows that I have turned a great many so-called irretrievable defeats into victories."

- Bjorn Borg, former no. 1 world tennis champion



Section 2 Maximize your day of small beginnings.

What do you mean by “maximize”?

To “maximize” means to get the most advantage out of a situation. What is a “small beginning”, you ask? For you, it’s that “foot-in-the-door” job - the first job in Canada that puts you back in your career. No more survival jobs like delivering pizza. The challenge is that you might not be employed at the level you were at in your previous country. This is the day of small beginnings you need to maximize. Don’t get frustrated and waste your first career opportunity if the job is below your skills. You need to put a lot of value on that first job opportunity.

Too many newcomers become discouraged and give up their “foot-in-the-door” jobs too quickly. This is understandable because the “day of small beginnings” is not really a day. It could be a week, a month, a year, or even longer in a job that is too easy or very boring. Newcomers get frustrated because they have so much more expertise to offer Canada. Yet, don’t waste this job opportunity because you feel you deserve a better job at a higher level. You do. But to get there you need to prove yourself here. Don’t take it personally. Other newcomers have similar experiences. People immigrating to other countries in the world also go through the integration journey. Everyone’s experiences are similar, as well as unique. But this particular journey is yours. Maximize your first career job in Canada; don’t waste it by focusing on what you don’t have. Focus on why the day of small beginnings is important.

Why the “day of small beginnings” is important

This job will be your first Canadian work reference, which will secure your next better job. Experience suggest that at least 40 percent of newcomers do not maximize this valuable part of their career. Stay positive. Maximize that first job.

Return on Investment

When you do well in your first career opportunity, you will leave that job with valuable Canadian work experience. You will have a strong reference from your supervisor or employer. This is called your “track record.” It shows new employers that you have the technical skills for a new job. But more importantly, a reference shows you have the non-technical skills. These “soft skills” include qualities like staying positive, working smarter versus harder, being a lifelong learner, using initiative, maximizing your time, and exceeding expectations.

How to maximize your day of small beginnings

1. **Stay positive** - Make a list of the positive parts of your job. Write a list of qualities and skills you want your employer to associate with you when they write a reference for you, or promote you. Read through the lists when you feel bored or underutilized in a “small beginnings” job. When you lose energy and career momentum, stay positive. Even when you know you have more skills to offer a company. Even if you supervised the work in your previous country, do the job with excellence.



KEY POINT - You need to skillfully manage the first job back in your career, whether or not it uses all your skills.

CULTURE BOX 1.4 Suspending judgment

To judge means to put a value on an object or behavior, to have an opinion of whether it is right or wrong, good or bad. To suspend means to stop, to wait, or to hang somewhere in the middle.

The first skill of intercultural competence is to “suspend judgement.” When someone says or does something that you find annoying or rude, the best thing to do is to step back in your mind. Look at the situation without emotion. Don’t judge. Ask yourself “What’s going on? Could it be a cultural thing?” Even if it really annoys you, suspend judgement. Recall what you know about culture. You might be offended where no offense was intended. It could be a cultural misunderstanding.

You can usually avoid problems later by just stepping back in your mind and asking yourself: what’s going on? Remember, you work in one of the most multicultural workforces in the world.

Section 2 Maximize your day of small beginnings.

When your emotions go up and down, you need to focus on the future. Unfortunately, some newcomers become negative. The quality of their work goes down. They don't meet their project deadlines. They withdraw from their teams and become isolated. They wonder why they ever left their country. They begin to criticize Canada. Don't let this be you. Develop your own ways to stay positive.

2. **Work smarter, not harder** - This doesn't mean coming to work really early or being the last person to leave the office. In fact, unless you have pressing work deadlines, working overtime in a "small beginnings" role is unnecessary. Working smarter means putting effort into actions that will get you to your next career goal. You can try the following:
 - Practice excellence in your technical skills.
 - Take useful training offered at work, especially workplace integration courses.
 - Ask good questions to learn fast. Use a notebook to record key info and to avoid asking again later. Ask when you don't know. You don't "lose face" by asking. If you don't ask, and then you make a mistake, you "lose face." There is usually something to ask, so ask and you won't get it wrong. But remember, the only dumb question is the one you keep asking. So get into the habit of writing things down.
 - Show initiative. Look for more work when you're finished, instead of waiting at your desk for someone to come to you. Figure out as much as you can by yourself. But, don't waste time when you get stuck. Instead, ask a team member, and if no one knows, ask your supervisor.
3. **Exceed your employer's expectations.** Don't think a job is too boring or too easy for you. Just do it, and do it well each time. It will be noticed. It will be remembered. It's like a deposit into a bank account. You will be able to draw from it in the future when you need a good reference for the next stage in your career. You can try the following:
 - Be detailed in your work, but stay on time. Double-check and triple-check your work. Ask a coworker to check something, if you're unsure. If you lack time, ask for more time. An employer can normally extend deadlines, if you don't ask at the end when it is too late.
 - Get a written job description from your supervisor. Ask where previous employees tended to experience difficulties in your job. Then exceed the role's expectations, both technical and non-technical. Avoid mediocrity. Aim to do the best that has ever been done in that role, despite your language or cultural limitations.

CULTURE BOX 1.5 Using a notebook

Buy a good notebook for work. Write down everything that you will soon be expected to know by memory. Your brain won't remember everything and often forgets the important stuff. With a notebook, you will be able to go back and check everything without having to ask someone every time. It also makes you look competent. At team meetings, use your notebook. When workplace mentors or supervisors explain things to you, make notes. Say to them, "Do you mind if I take a few notes as we speak. I want to make sure I learn this quickly."

In the workplace, doing things independently is called initiative and Canadians expect lots of it from you. Write down new words, acronyms, departments, instructions, processes, procedures, dates, appointments etc. Rough estimates suggest most people forget 70% of everything they hear within 24 hours. And then 70% of that remaining 30% within three days. Fill up a notebook instead. Even the small stuff like colleagues' names.



Unwritten Rule # 2 Show a “half-full” attitude

Imagine a glass of water filled half-way. Is the glass half-empty or half-full? The answer is both because it depends on how you look at the situation. People with a “half-full” attitude find the positive outlook on a problem. They stay positive so that it is easier to find a solution, not because they are denying the problem. Even if reality seems negative, the “half-full” person stays hopeful. For example, a person with a “half-full” attitude sees their first job back in their career as less stressful, instead of too easy or boring. This is especially important for newcomers who are restarting their careers in a new country.

Remember, when you do resign from a job or get promoted, your employer will be the main reference of your Canadian experience. Start showing today the qualities you want that employer to think of first when they act as your reference in the future. Show those qualities everyday, even when it feels false. Start with a “half-full” attitude. Below, you will find a few examples of what a positive, or half-full, attitude looks like:

- **Be positive.** Don't complain. Find opportunities and solutions, not problems. Be part of the solution.
- **Be easy-going.** Be open, willing to try new or less familiar tasks, if you have the right support.
- **Exceed expectations.** Go beyond your best in the work you're given.
- **Be constructive.** Don't criticize people. Be clear about what you disagree with, but you don't make it personal. Your ideas and opinions should build a team, not pull people down.
- **Use mistakes to learn.** Be more interested in giving something a try than worrying about making mistakes. Learn from mistakes instead of worrying about “losing face”.
- **Learn continuously.** Be a life-long learner. Work hard at developing your English and communication skills.
- **Be social.** Smile. Use open friendly body language. Participate in the team and social activities in the organization.
- **Change your friends.** Get to know coworkers who have a half-full attitude. Avoid hanging around with half-empty people.
- **Use 10-10-10 thinking.** This approach to life comes from author Suzy Welch. When you face a difficult situation or decision, ask yourself the following: What will be the results of my actions in 10 minutes, in 10 weeks and in 10 years? 10-10-10 thinking will help you remember that every problem has an end, and every future needs good planning.

“Throughout my life as a composer, I have learnt chiefly through my mistakes, not by my exposure to great wisdom and knowledge.” - Igor Stravinsky, composer, one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people of the 20th century



Section 3 Expand your enabling skills. Advance your technical expertise.

What are technical and enabling skills?

Your technical skills include your knowledge and abilities in your specific occupation. Enabling skills*, on the other hand, are the non-technical skills you need for success at work. Enabling skills are also called “soft skills.” They combine with your technical skills to enable you to move forward in your career. Essentially, enabling skills are the cultural norms in the workplace. In the Canadian workplace, they include your communication skills, your proficiency in English, your intercultural competence, along with your interpersonal and personal management skills etc. In fact, all the information in this desk reference are the enabling skills. The Twenty-eight Articles in Part 2 were a summary of the key enabling skills.

Enabling skills exist in every workplace, but how they are used and which ones are important differ between cultures. In fact, enabling skills can even differ between occupations. People grow in their enabling skills throughout their careers. Most importantly, enabling skills are transferable to other job and life situations. As mentioned, enabling skills are better known as “soft skills” or non-technical skills, whereas your technical skills are also termed “hard skills.”

Your employer will probably use the term soft skills. In this desk reference, the term enabling skills is used so that you understand their critical importance - that they enable your technical skills to give you career success. Many newcomers only focus on upgrading technical skills. In their first countries, technical skills lead to success, since they already have the enabling (cultural) skills of their first culture. In Canada, people rarely achieve career success without merging strong enabling skills with excellent technical skills. Once a newcomer realizes and accepts this, and once the person begins to adapt, career opportunities become more positive.

*The term “enabling skills” was created by Nava Israel at the Chang School, Ryerson University in Toronto.

Why enabling skills are important

Enabling skills, together with your technical skills, form the foundation of trust in the workplace, and build your credibility and rapport with colleagues. Too often, newcomers are not fully aware of the value employers place on enabling skills. And employers are not aware of which enabling skills are not familiar to newcomers. Consequently, the need for enabling skills often remains unknown to newcomers, and an unspoken expectation from employers. Great technical skills and strong enabling skills are a winning combination. But if you are limited in either one, you are going to lack mobility in your career.

Return on Investment

Technical skills get you employed. Enabling skills keep you employed and open up career opportunities. By broadening your enabling skills, you will be better at meeting employer expectations for working with others and for personal management, such as time and tasks. This will lead to better career opportunities, less stress and conflict. They will build better trust and credibility with colleagues and clients. They will contribute to a much more enjoyable and rewarding workplace integration experience.



KEY POINT - Enabling skills open up career opportunities and combine with technical skills to establish trust and credibility with your team and clients.

How to expand your enabling skills

1. **Be open to change** - You have brought enabling skills to Canada from your first language and culture. Many are transferable into your Canadian workplace; some are not transferable. This desk reference is designed to raise your awareness of the most common enabling skills through the principles, readings, boxes and unwritten rules. Only you can know which ones you need to adapt for the workplace. For example, one newcomer from Africa realized after some time that using emotion and louder volume in his voice to persuade people was not working in meetings.

He lowered his volume to the level of his colleagues and replaced emotion with objectivity. He adjusted his communication style by being better prepared at meetings with more facts and statistics to support his ideas. It worked. Although this resource can help you, the decision to adapt are up to you. Every newcomer's experience and context is unique. And everyone is at various stages of the integration journey.

2. **Identify which enabling skills you need** - In this desk reference, many enabling skills are defined in the four principles, readings, unwritten rules and boxes. They are your starting point. Some you need to learn, some are the same as those in your first culture, and some may not be useful to you. Some are important now, and some will be important later. As you read through this desk reference, mark off the skills you believe are important to your integration journey.
3. **Take ownership** - Don't wait to be told where you need to develop. Take ownership of your own learning and development. Discuss "soft skills" with Canadian colleagues. Ask for feedback on where you could develop. Ask questions such as "What should I stop, start and keep doing in my communication, or my actions?" Find the right learning sources. If the company provides integration training, or mentoring and coaching, go ahead and participate. If you need formal studies such as evening classes, then join. Keep moving forward and listen to people you can trust. No one in Canada is going to tell you what to do, but they will give suggestions if you ask. You have to own your integration journey.



Section 3 Expand your enabling skills. Advance your technical skills.

Unwritten Rule # 3 Expand your enabling skills before seeking a promotion

You want to get promoted. You want to get back to a level in your career that is similar to what you had before you immigrated. Be patient. First learn the enabling skills that will keep you in the position that you want.

Ask your supervisor to help you give direction to your career. Ask your supervisor to help you identify what skills, knowledge and attitude will get you to your next career goal. Employers are looking for employees who want to practice the enabling skills in this desk reference. If you put too much emphasis on your education, your experience or expertise, in order to get promoted, you are not going to find promotion. Employers look for employees who show a willingness to learn, to change, to learn from mistakes and avoid repeating them, to take on challenges, to master the new or unfamiliar etc.

Leading in your expertise means being technically strong and being able to work well with others, especially difficult people or people that you do not agree with. Few people ever fully master all enabling skills. You are not expected to be perfect. That is unrealistic. But you should always be willing to learn and adapt.

If you are so good at your job that your employer doesn't want to lose you in that role, and is slow to promote you, ask for a meeting to talk about career opportunities. If they won't give you new opportunities, then start looking for better work. Once you start growing in your enabling skills and have good technical capabilities, your skills are going to be marketable. Your confidence will increase.



Upgrade Your Communication Skills



Your communication skills are not your English skills. Instead, communication skills are what you do with the English you have. Your first culture has defined how you use your first language. That communication style carries into your English, making it hard to understand you at times. Principle 2 looks at adapting four aspects of communication, namely clarity, conciseness, coherence and consensus. It will also look at the “3-30-3 Model” as a way to be better prepared to speak at meetings.

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CASE STUDY

Integration in process

Yue

Yue came to Canada from Asia. His skill set was very specialized, uncommon, and increasingly in demand. He had been offered a job by a large Canadian company. Yue enjoyed his work and was confident in his technical capabilities. He had already worked for an American company in Asia.

However, within a few days of working in Canada, Yue began to experience challenges. Although his pronunciation was clear, and his English was good, his colleagues and clients didn't seem to understand him. His updates, presentations, opinions and ideas rarely achieved anything. He asked for feedback from his supervisor who suggested he keep his communications short and to the point. Yue tried to think in English at work instead of translating in his mind before he spoke. This was a good strategy. Within a few months he was able to speak more quickly, but some blank stares and polite smiles from colleagues suggested he was still not communicating effectively.

Yue's supervisor suggested he join the company's Toastmasters Club. The group met at lunch time every Wednesday in the boardroom to practice public speaking. This didn't work because Yue didn't lack confidence to speak in front of people. Something else was wrong and no one could tell him exactly what in his communication was not effective. Yue had developed a good working relationship with a Canadian colleague on the team. The guy had worked in Asia and suggested that Yue's difficulties might be due to his cultural communication style. Yue did the best thing he could have done. Instead of waiting for more people to give him the solutions, he took control of his problem. He went online and did a Google search on intercultural communication styles, focusing on the style from his first culture and language.

He learned a lot by himself. Many cultural realities that he had experienced in the Canadian workplace were put into words for him through various websites and articles. His worries began to decrease. Then he found the answer he was looking for in an online blog. His cultural communication style tended to put the most important point at the end of his message. He needed to frontload his message with what he wanted people to know or do. It was difficult for his Canadian colleagues to follow his ten-minute update, if they had no idea what his main point was. Back in Yue's first culture, it was normal to build up to the main point. The main point came at the end. In fact, it was too forceful to frontload the main point. It took Yue a few practice updates to feel comfortable changing his communication style. At first, it felt awkward, even wrong, but he soon saw the difference in the behavior of his coworkers.

He also learned how to stay on topic, to be clear in his word choices, to avoid too much academic speak. Yue also began to prep before meetings. He wrote down what he wanted to say in point form. And that was the beginning of a new chapter for Yue's career in Canada.



Section 4 Speak with clarity coherence and conciseness

What are these Cs?

Clarity, conciseness, coherence, together with consensus, are the four building blocks of the Canadian communication style. Clarity relates to word choices, coherence to the organization of a message, and conciseness to the amount and specificity of information. Consensus, relates to how trust and respect are built. Consensus is introduced in Box 2.1 and 2.2., and will be explored in detail in Section 5. Section 4 focuses on clarity, coherence and conciseness.

Why they are important

Your first culture has defined how you use your first language. That communication style carries into your English and can limit native-speakers of English from understanding your message. As with we saw with Yue, in the case study, his clarity, coherence and conciseness were not adapted to his new workplace culture. From your first culture and language, you have certain ways of being clear, concise and coherent that do not carry over into the Canadian English workplace. This is even true for newcomers from other English-speaking countries.

Return on Investment

The return on your time invested in adapting your clarity coherence and conciseness is in the following areas with colleagues and clients:

- **Fewer misunderstandings.** Listeners will understand what you want them to do or to know at the start of speaking.
- **Less friction.** With fewer misunderstandings, and better communication, there is less chance of conflict between people.
- **More respect.** Your credibility depends more on the right communication skills than on having perfect English. There are newcomers who have less English than you but have better communication skills. This statement doesn't mean that you don't need to master English for work. But understand that your communication style is how you use the English you already have. It is how you choose your words. How you organize the message. How many words you use. Turn to Figure 2.1 on the following page to understand how to be clear, coherent and concise.



clarity coherence conciseness consensus

KEY POINT - Your ability to adjust your clarity, coherence and conciseness will boost your credibility with colleagues. It will ensure you are better understood from the moment you start speaking. These three Cs intersect with your consensus to form the four core building blocks of the Canadian workplace communication style.



Section 4 Speak with clarity coherence and conciseness.

How to be clear, coherent and concise

Although clarity, coherence and conciseness are found in every language, they are expressed differently. A concise sentence in one language might sound confusing in another language. At the same time, the communication style from your first language should not be replaced. You need to keep it because you will use it, at times, with people who come from a similar cultural and language background to you.

Instead, you need to add new ways of communication. First, this means mastering the Canadian communication norms. And second, it requires a good understanding of intercultural communication because the Canadian workplace is very multicultural. In many situations, the patterns from your first language will be effective, but where they are ineffective, you need to be able to choose from a wider range of communication skills. Figure 2.1 defines the key points to clarity, coherence and conciseness for your Canadian workplace.

Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose the simplest words. Big words do not impress Canadians in the business world. Limit complexity when you talk about complicated topics.
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize your ideas into specific points. Frontload the main point. Unless it's negative news, which you should embed towards the end. Transition clearly from one point to the next.
Conciseness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get to the point quickly. Eliminate the unnecessary. Be aware of the "unwritten" time limits for speaking.

Figure 2.1 The Defining Norms for Clarity Coherence and Conciseness in the Canadian Workplace

CULTURE BOX 2.1 Consensus in Canadian communication

Consensus works with clarity, coherence and conciseness to form the four building blocks (see Figure 2.2) of the Canadian communication style in your workplace. In fact, skillfully building consensus is the centerpiece. Some define it as a strange combination of being direct and indirect at the same time. Sometimes it sounds like uncertainty, although others call it diplomacy. It requires the use of "softeners" - specific language that softens opinion, disagreement, requests and correction in order to build agreement and maintain harmony.

To some newcomers, the way Canadians typically build consensus sounds insincere or uncertain. As one newcomer said, "Canadians say one thing but mean something else. They say they are not sure, but then they give you their opinion." However, it is not insincere; rather, it is a way to build agreement slowly and carefully between people. Consensus and "softeners" are the centerpiece of professional workplace culture. Consensus and softeners are as much a part of Canadian culture as Tim Horton's coffee ©.

Figure 2.2 Four Building Blocks of the Canadian Communication Style

Section 4 Speak with clarity coherence and conciseness.

Comparing Clarity, Coherence and Conciseness

Table 2.1 below gives a more detailed comparison of clarity, coherence and conciseness. Line 1 states the questions you should ask yourself before communicating. Line 2 gives the answers for a Canadian communication style at work. Items in line 3 explain the benefits of using this approach. Line 4 gives a brief explanation of why this can be a challenge for some newcomers from some first languages and cultures. Line 5 gives the opposite, to line two, that is often used by some newcomers at work. Line 6 explains the potential negative results of that alternative from line 5.

	Clarity	Coherence	Conciseness
1. Key Question	<i>Which words do I use?</i>	<i>Where do I put the main point?</i>	<i>How much information is too much?</i>
2. the Answer from Canadians	Uncomplicated word choices and simpler sentence structures.	Frontload the main point, followed by logically organized points and clear transitions between ideas.	Be to the point - brief but comprehensive.
3. the Benefit	Everyone understands you almost all the time.	No one is confused about what you want them to know or do.	Everyone listens to you almost all the time.
4. the Challenge for newcomers	For some newcomers, this sounds and feels less professional.	Feels too soon too fast. Frontloading a main point sounds and feels disrespectful or aggressive.	For some newcomers, a sophisticated communication style requires elaboration, repetition and storytelling to be persuasive and credible.
5. the Opposite	Jargon, academic speak	The main point often goes at the end, or is implied.	Wordiness
6. the Result	Some listeners are excluded because they don't understand.	The communication seems disorganized and unfocused. There is no "hook". People become disinterested in listening.	Communication seems off topic and irrelevant.

Table 2.1 A Comparison of Clarity Coherence and Conciseness

CULTURE BOX 2.2 Softeners create consensus

Building consensus in the workplace requires the use of "softeners." These are specific words that soften opinion, disagreement, requests and feedback etc. in order to build agreement between colleagues. For example, Canadian colleagues might use more suggestion than opinion - "We could probably extend the deadline" versus "We must extend the deadline." "Could" and "probably" soften the opinion, making it sound less strong. It is not meant to weaken the opinion; rather it indirectly invites ideas from other team members so that consensus can be reached on an issue. It is also a way of bypassing, or minimizing, tension and conflict. There are many more softeners, phrases such as "I could be wrong, but...", "I hear what you are saying, and..." and words like "probably", "perhaps" etc. Section 3 will expand more on softeners.



Section 4 Speak with clarity coherence and conciseness.

Examples of Effective and Ineffective Communication

Table 2.2 below includes extracts from a short talk on culture by a training director to a team of managers. The “Effective” talk (example 1) is clear, coherent and concise for most English-speaking Canadians. The “Ineffective” talk (example 2) is unnecessarily complicated, and too disconnected and wordy for the listeners.

The training director had 3 minutes at the meeting to give this talk. His aim was to make sure the managers knew why they needed to understand the intercultural concept of “power distance” in their work with newcomers. Read and compare the two talks in the table. Take note of the highlighted parts in the “Ineffective” talk. If you turn to this section in the workbook, you can explore each of these with more detail. You will gain a good understanding of what it means to be clear, concise and coherent in your Canadian workplace.

	Clarity	Coherence	Conciseness
Effective Talk “example 1”	<i>Clear</i> - “Hierarchy is a reality in every workplace. In the intercultural field, hierarchy is termed power distance. Basically, it describes the power relationships between subordinates and their superiors.”	<i>Coherent</i> - “As a supervisor, power distance is important to understand because it greatly affects the expectations and behaviors of the people you oversee. For example, people from backgrounds of high power distances between supervisor and subordinate tend to feel they shouldn’t have ambitions beyond their rank. In the Canadian workplace, it means some newcomers may not show enough initiative on the team.”	<i>Concise</i> - Similarly, as a newcomer, understanding power distance is key to meeting the unwritten expectations in your organization. For example, if you are used to working with a high power distance between you and your supervisors, you may need to adjust your behavior such as speaking up more in meetings. Alternatively, if you are used to very low power distance, you may need to use more softeners in your speech.
Ineffective Talk “example 2”	<i>Unnecessarily complicated</i> - “ Power distance is a ubiquitous workplace reality and is predominantly defined as the extent to which less powerful members of organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. ”	<i>Too disconnected</i> - “People from backgrounds of high power distances between supervisor and subordinate tend to feel they shouldn’t have ambitions beyond their rank. In the Canadian workplace, it means some newcomers may not show enough initiative on the team. So, power distance can greatly affect the expectations and behaviors of the people you oversee. ”	<i>Too wordy and off topic</i> - Similarly, if you are new to Canada, understanding power distance is key to meeting and following the unwritten expectations in your organization. Historically, we have seen that attention has not been given to properly preparing newcomers for the workplace by explaining power distance. I don’t want more people coming to Canada and not being able to meet expectations. If you are used to working with a high power distance between you and your supervisors, you may need to adjust your behavior, such as speaking up more in meetings. Alternatively, if you are used to very low power distance, you may need to use more softeners in your speech.

Table 2.2 A Comparison of Effective and Ineffective Communication Styles for the Canadian Workplace

Section 5 Build Consensus with Softeners

What is consensus?

Consensus is the centerpiece to the Canadian communication style. Building consensus is more than the act of agreeing. It is the Canadian cultural approach to various speech acts such as sharing ideas and opinions, disagreeing with others, affirming others and their ideas, making and refusing requests, pointing out and responding to mistakes, confirming information and understanding, interrupting others, turn taking, raising issues and concerns, and using apology.

Using speech that builds consensus is considered respectful and polite. It is the preferred Canadian approach for limiting or avoiding friction when interacting with other people. This aspect of Canadian communication can take time to master. As mentioned in Section 4, consensus works together with clarity, coherence and conciseness to form four key building blocks of the preferred communication style in the Canadian workplace.

What are softeners?

Consensus works through communication “softeners” - specific language that softens a speaker’s approach in discussions i.e. makes their message easier to receive. As a discussion develops, the speaker can become more assertive, using fewer softeners. Essentially, softeners ensure that the process of talking about something doesn’t start with strong categorical, definitive, unqualified positions. For example, instead of starting with strong certainty, discussions develop towards certainty. Even when speakers have strong opinions or feelings on an issue, they will start with softeners in order to sound less confrontational and dogmatic. Softeners can include the following:

- Words e.g. “often”, “some”, “could”, “maybe”, “perhaps”, “probably”
- Phrases e.g. “From my experience, ...”, “So I am guessing that, ...”
- Clauses e.g. “I hear what you are saying, but...”, “I am just wondering whether ...”
- Sentences e.g. “I am not sure I agree”
- Speech acts e.g. starting with suggestion, rather than a strong opinion

Example. Compare the following two sentences. The two speakers are both giving their opinions. However, Speaker A is more direct and Speaker B uses the consensus approach with softeners.

Speaker A - “I am not happy with the work so far. I have two major concerns.”

Speaker B - “I like the project, but I do have a couple of suggestions that I think would be worth considering, and I think would add to the success of the project.”

In the Canadian workplace, Speaker B’s word choices (softeners) invite collaboration, despite the concerns. The approach is less confrontational or threatening. Speaker B is saying the same thing as Speaker A, yet in a more roundabout way. Speaker A’s more direct approach tends to be used only in crisis situations.



KEY POINT - Consensus relates to the use of communication “softeners” to build agreement with others to get things done collaboratively. It is a core soft skill and is the centerpiece of the Canadian communication style.



Why consensus and softeners are important

The purpose of consensus and softeners is to ensure harmony, collaboration and objectivity in human interactions at work. The Canadian style tries to avoid publicly discrediting a coworker, or making the person feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, consensus is not indirect communication (see page 56); rather, it is a softer, less “head-to-head” approach to human interactions.

Many Canadians would assume that all English-speaking cultures use softeners in the same way. Yet, they don’t. Newcomers from the US, the UK, Australia, South Africa and other countries say they have to use more softeners to adapt to the Canadian communication style. Native-speakers of English from these countries usually notice the emphasis on consensus sooner than non-native speaker newcomers. In terms of language training, the use of softeners is considered an advanced speaking and writing skill.

The Challenge. Newcomers, who were previously supervisors in more hierarchical cultures, tend to use more confrontational language with subordinates. Their communication style tends to be more directive (telling versus asking). The Canadian leadership style uses softeners and consensus to persuade, and is rarely confrontational or directive. Newcomers need to adjust how they communicate with subordinates, and how they expect their own supervisors to communicate with them.

Also, some newcomers, especially those with more direct communication styles e.g. Europeans, often find using softeners challenging. They feel softeners are misleading, that they make a speaker sound uncertain, and therefore untrustworthy. They say softeners weaken a speaker’s credibility. They believe a professional, with education and experience, should be certain of their facts and opinions from the start, or otherwise they should simply not say anything at all. These newcomers find it difficult to use softeners because they feel that they are not being authentic, or that they are not being forthright. In the worst case scenario they feel disingenuous or hypocritical.

The Solution. The solution for newcomers (used to a more direct communication style) is in the following three steps:

1. **Accept.** Recognize the opposite, yet equally valid, cultural values that support the two different communication styles. The values preference for being more direct is to be clear and avoid misunderstandings. The Canadian consensus style puts more value on harmony and collaboration in human interactions.
2. **Adapt.** Add the opposite style to your communication repertoire; don’t replace your direct approach. Both can be used, but in different situations. Use the direct approach with coworkers from your first culture or similar backgrounds, and in critical situations in the workplace e.g. emergencies.
3. **Be mindful.** Realize that when using softeners, you are not seen as misleading or disingenuous, but rather as building consensus. Also understand that being too direct in the wrong context will be interpreted as aggressive or dogmatic.

Return on Investment

Experience and observation suggest that with strong interpersonal skills, job security tends to be more stable and career opportunities more certain. Consensus and softeners are essential to career success in most Canadian workplaces. Canadians use the concept “strong interpersonal skills” (consensus and softeners are theoretical terms used by language academics). Canadians tend to put the same high value on strong interpersonal skills as on good technical skills.

More importantly, as a newcomer, you don’t want your communication to be misunderstood as confrontational, overly directive, aggressive or dogmatic. You add consensus to your communication repertoire to gain credibility and rapport in a very multicultural Canadian workplace.



Section 5 Build Consensus with softeners.

How to use softeners and build consensus

There are hundreds of “softeners”, too many to document in this resource. However, by raising your awareness, you can begin to hear them at work. Make a mental or written note of them in order to remember and use them effectively.

Example of Softeners

Read the two speech bubbles in the example below. These two examples occurred in the first few minutes of a company meeting. The chair of the meeting asked for input from the team. The question: whether or not their company should participate in a government-funded intern program. Compare these first responses from the two different employees, John and Teri.

Speaker 1 - John

We have to go ahead with the idea now, before it is too late. Phillip and I went over the pros and cons yesterday. It's a good opportunity.



Speaker 1, John, is too assertive too quickly with his opinion. It leaves no opening for his team to contribute other viewpoints. They would have to match his assertiveness, which is not the Canadian tendency.

To John, his direct approach shows the team that he has thought the issue out and has the facts. However, it often creates an awkward atmosphere in a meeting. It sounds like Phillip and John had already made the decision without consulting with the rest of their team.

Speaker 2 - Teri

My **initial** thoughts are that we **should probably** go ahead with the idea **while the opportunity is available**. Phillip and I went over the pros and cons yesterday, **but I am not sure what everyone else thinks**.



Speaker 2, Teri, uses suggestion, which opens opportunity for others to contribute. She doesn't want to position herself as the only expert; instead, she wants expertise and decision-making power to come through the team, by contribution, collaboration and consensus.

In addition, if her idea is wrong, a suggestion won't make her feel as awkward as a strong opinion. By starting off sounding less assertive or less certain, she can modify her opinion as new information comes up in the meeting. Softeners enable speakers to keep their credibility by arriving at solutions and decisions as a team.

Unwritten Rule #4 Ask when you don't understand

Always ask when you don't know something or don't understand the English words. You won't "lose face." Ask for clarification whenever you are not sure. The only stupid question is the question you don't ask. Actually, the only stupid question is the one you keep asking. Use a notebook to write down what you need to remember. Don't nod, laugh or shake your head if someone asks if you understood. Don't use body language or eyes to suggest you didn't understand. It won't work. You need to ask with your voice. Use the following guidelines for getting clarification:

1. Tell the person what you did understand, using their words.
2. Ask the person to explain again what you didn't understand.
3. Ask the person to use simpler language, if it was too difficult.
4. Ask the person to speak slowly and clearly, if you still don't understand.
5. Repeat it back to the person to check accuracy.
6. Write it down if you need to.
7. Thank the person for their patience.



Unwritten Rule #5 Bring up problems and mistakes a.s.a.p.

If you make a mistake with serious effects on a project or on your deliverables, you need to bring up the problem, as soon as possible, to your supervisor or team. Don't try to fix it by yourself, especially if you believe it is beyond your control. Don't try to hide it either. Instead, bring it up with your team or supervisor. You will "lose face" (lose credibility/respect in front of others) if you ignore, hide or deny it, or blame someone else.

Mistakes can usually be forgiven, if they are dealt with as soon as possible, and not repeated. A smart company doesn't fire an employee for making mistakes, if the employee catches the mistakes early, and deals with the mistakes properly. Most importantly, the specific employee must show that he or she has learnt from the mistakes, so that the mistake is not made again. However, credibility is lost when the person keeps making the same mistake, or refuses to admit to a mistake. You don't "lose face" for making a mistake. You do "lose face" when you make the mistake again, if you deny it, or blame someone else, or don't catch the mistake in time.

In the Canadian workplace, a mistake is usually seen as a valuable learning experience. Everyone makes mistakes, but smart people deal with them quickly and avoid making the same mistake again. Companies invest a lot of resources in hiring new employees, from advertising the position to training them for the job. You are too valuable as an employee to lose your job from a mistake, but you need to learn from your mistakes, avoid making them again, and bring them up to the right person as soon as possible.

Section 5 Build Consensus with softeners.

Unwritten Rule #6 Learn from your mistakes

Don't fight mistakes. Admit them, move on, and avoid them next time. Being able to admit errors and learn from them builds your credibility.

Double-check your work to avoid careless mistakes. A big but unintentional mistake can be forgiven, if it is used as an opportunity to learn. But don't make the same mistake again. On the other hand, careless mistakes, especially the ones you repeat, or worse yet, you try to defend, will undermine your credibility (respect and trust) with coworkers.

This doesn't mean that you say "yeah, you're right" to everything and anyone. Instead, choose your battles carefully. You have to decide whether you want to be right every time, or happy as well. In some workplace cultures, and with some people, having a stubborn opinion each time is essential to career success. Not so here in Canada. In the Canadian professional workplace, trying to be right every time gives the impression to coworkers that you are difficult to work with. It will isolate you. You need to give a little flexibility to get a little flexibility.

Building credibility in the Canadian workplace has its unique set of rules. Always defending your strong opinion is not one of them, especially if there is more than one way of doing something. If it's not your responsibility to make a decision, be clear in your opinion, but don't force it. If it is your decision, learn how to build consensus with your team, to be clear, concise and coherent instead. These build your credibility.

Unwritten Rule #7 Point out mistakes with "softeners".

When you make a mistake at work, admit it. Don't argue the point. Admit personal error, learn from it, and avoid repeating the same mistake. You will gain respect from your team. Take note of how Canadian colleagues point out your mistakes. They will likely use "softeners." Take note of the words the person chooses, body language, facial expression and voice. They are all important. It might be different to the approach in your first language and culture. If someone else makes an error, use the approach that is the norm in your Canadian workplace to point out the mistake. The approach will be mostly the same towards subordinates, peers and seniors. If your supervisor makes a critical mistake, you should speak up. The approach in your Canadian workplace will likely include some or all of the following:

- **Don't accuse.** Begin by giving the person the benefit of the doubt i.e. something unexpected or outside their control may have contributed to the error, such as another person. In this way, you start with the right emotions, without accusation in your voice, expressions or body language.
- **Find what is correct first.** Affirm what is correct before questioning the certainty of facts or implying there are errors.
- **Be flexible.** Allow for explanations, new facts or alternative approaches that you are unaware of.
- **Suggest, don't tell.** Suggest specific changes or alternatives. Use "softeners."
- **Know the Canadian perspective - mistakes are lessons to learn.** Understand it is human to error, as long as the person learns and avoids the mistake next time.
- **Set a reasonable deadline.** Give a specific time frame to correct the error, but also give the person reasonable amount of time.



Section 6 Be prepared for meetings

What does it mean to be prepared?

To arrive prepared for a meeting means preparing to speak before you get there. This includes having a rough outline of what you need to say, as well as bringing a notebook and pen, any visuals that will make understanding easier, and the agenda with any materials you need to print. All of this could be saved on your laptop. But above all, you need to be ready to speak. Your ideas need to be organized in your head and preferably put into a digital or ink form before you go. This requires a rough outline of bulleted points and key words, concepts and notes, not a pre-written speech. The outline must enable you to be clear, coherent and concise. In this section, we will explore the 3-30-3 Model to help you build highly-focused outlines quickly.



KEY POINT - Put your ideas into an outline on paper before you speak so that your ideas are in order and easy to find. Then you can focus on other aspects of your English. Your communication will be clearer, more coherent and concise, and easier to understand.

Why it's important

Even if you are fluent in English, it is easier to speak persuasively, and in plain language, when you have “mapped out” your message on paper. The ability to sequence your ideas, to be less wordy and to stay on topic are much easier with a rough outline. Then you will be free to focus on other aspects of your English, such as clearer pronunciation or the right body language. You need to be prepped whether you are in a one-on-one meeting, just giving a quick update at a team meeting, or doing a formal presentation to a group.

Return on Investment

Prepping an outline of what you need to say will result in a more stress-free talk. You will sound much more clear, concise and coherent. You will appear more confident with colleagues and clients. All this equals more credibility.

How to be prepped

In your notebook, draft an outline of what you should say first, what can be left out, and how you should sequence the information. The 3-30-3 Model can help you do this quickly. It can be found in Table 2.3 on the following page.



Section 6 Be prepared for meetings.

The **3-30-3 Model** is an easy-to-use way of drafting a fast outline. The 3-30-3 uses three questions to create your rough outline:

- If I had only 3 seconds to speak, what would I say?
- If I had another 30 seconds, what points best support that main point?
- If I had an extra 3 minutes, how would I expand each point?

Your answers will be the focus of what your audience needs to know and/or do. On the next page, we will put this model into a chart.

The 3-30-3 Model		
<p>- 3 - If I had only 3 seconds to speak, what would I say?</p>	<p>- 30 - If I had another 30 seconds, what points best support that main point?</p>	<p>- 3 - If I had an extra 3 minutes, how would I expand each point?</p>
<p>Main Point The answer becomes the main point of your talk. This question, under such short time, focuses everything to the core message. You could also ask it this way: What does my audience need to know and/or do, once the talk is over? It identifies your purpose for speaking clear.</p>	<p>Supporting Points These answers give the supporting points to your main point. If you break it down to 3 points, you imagine that you only have 10 seconds to state each point. Clearly ordered supporting points make your talk more connected and easier to follow. coherent.</p>	<p>Body This is the “how”. This question helps set out the body of your talk. Imagine that you have 60 seconds to expand on each of your 3 supporting points. During a meeting, you would naturally extend or limit your talking time, and fill the content with useful examples, visuals, demonstrations etc. By limiting your time in the planning stage, you can eliminate unnecessary details, which then makes your talk sound much “tighter”. concise.</p>

Table 2.3 The 3-30-3 Model for Effective Communication

Even if you are unexpectedly asked to speak at a meeting, you can scribble down answers to the three questions to form a quick outline of what to say. If the issue or topic requires you to think a little more, you could ask the chair of the meeting for a few minutes to order your thoughts onto paper before you speak. The 3-30-3 Model creates an outline to “hang” all of your information on. Take a look at the explanations that are beneath each question in Table 2.6 below.

Section 6 Be prepared for meetings.

Unwritten Rule #8 Act on the unspoken meeting rules

In a meeting in your Canadian workplace, certain expectations are not written down, but you should act upon:

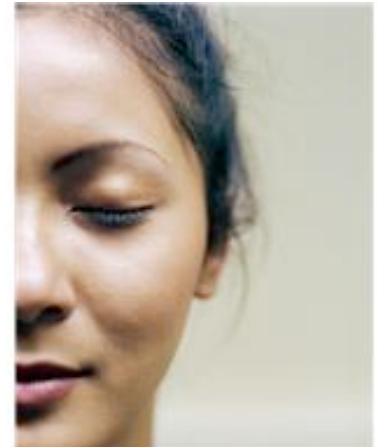
- Arrive a couple of minutes early, not late.
- Always ask when you do not understand.
- Speak up if you disagree or have a concern - ask whether now or later is a good time to raise an issue.
- Use the turn-taking and interrupting habits of your workplace.
- Use only English, even with your same-language coworkers.
- Participate positively with your body language.
- Contribute updates, ideas, comments, questions etc.
- Take notes on what you must remember.
- Don't talk beyond the acceptable time limit. Take note of your team/workplace's "unwritten" rules on how long to talk.
- Be solution-oriented in your contributions. Don't be negative. Don't complain or gossip.
- Be objective, but optimistic and positive whenever possible.
- Be clear, coherent and concise.
- Use softeners.
- Always seek to build consensus.



CULTURE BOX 2.3 The blind spot - "just be professional"

Cultural intelligence is not always identified as an immediate skill need. For some, it is a blind spot - something a person can't see, although it's there and it's real. Sometimes, it is easier to think the following: "If everyone just acts professionally, everything will be okay." Unfortunately, this doesn't work because the practice of "being professional" is a culturally-defined norm. It is not universally the same.

Although there are many similarities across workplace cultures, there are also significant differences. Clothes are a simple example - should managers have to wear suits? What about eye contact or touch? What about hygiene - is the public washroom a place to clean yourself or a place to keep clean? These examples are more basic compared with norms like personal disclosure i.e. how much of our personal lives we share with others at work. The Canadian workplace draws a clear line between private and work lives. Your Canadian workplace has distinct cultural norms that should be understood and acted on to ensure career success. Being professional in your Canadian workplace might have some differences to your previous experiences, but they are not so difficult to act on once you are aware of them.



Section 6 Be prepared for meetings.

Example

In the previous two examples from Section 1 (on an effective talk and an ineffective talk), the training director had three minutes to give a quick talk at a meeting to a team of managers. In the follow-up example below, the training director needs to persuade the managers to attend an intercultural workshop designed specifically for them.



In Figure 2.3 below, the middle column gives you an idea of what a quick outline on paper could look like. Then, in the right-hand column, that talk is written out as it might sound “live”, using the outline, or 3-30-3 Model.

Question	Quick Outline	The Talk
If I had only 3 seconds to speak, what would I say?	<p>Main Point – To invite them to a workshop. Say it’s designed for them.</p>	<p>“I would like to invite all of you to participate in the intercultural workshop. Especially since it has been tailored to managers.”</p>
If I had another 30 seconds, what points best support that main point?	<p>Supporting Points – They should attend because.... 1)our 70–30 employee ratio 2) the focus on power distance</p>	<p>“There are a couple of specific reasons you would benefit from attending. First, as you know, our organization has a 70-30 ration of newcomers to Canadian-born employees. And second, the workshop will focus on hierarchy, or power distance, because it is one of the key learnings for helping newcomers achieve their best on your teams.”</p>
If I had an extra 3 minutes, how would I expand each point?	<p>Expand 1)70–30: tie it to HR’s initiative, to the advisory, to volunteering. 2) expectations, behaviors – give the example of ambition and initiative.</p>	<p>“As I said, our company now has a 70-30 ratio. We have 15 nations represented on teams. That being said, the human resources department has initiated an intercultural advisory committee. It will meet bi-weekly to plan activities that maximize our company diversity. They will also be there to help you resolve any challenges on your teams due to cultural differences. The workshop will better equip you to volunteer on that committee if the opportunity arises.”</p>
	<p>Email – tomorrow by lunch RSVP – by Friday, the 18th</p>	<p>“But more importantly, I said the training will focus on power distance. As a supervisor, power distance is important to understand because it greatly affects the expectations and behaviors of the people you oversee. For example, people from backgrounds of high power distances between supervisor and subordinate tend to feel they shouldn’t have ambitions beyond their rank. In the Canadian workplace, it means some newcomers may not show enough initiative on the team.”</p> <p>“I will send out an email invite by tomorrow before lunch, and if you would like to attend, just respond by Friday.”</p>

Figure 2.3 Example of an Outline using the 3-30-3 Model

Exploring Body Language

Body language, or non-verbal communication, is an important part of communication. Your body language helps you to speak your thoughts, just like words do. Therefore, meetings at work have non-verbal communication norms. Read through the six tips listed in Figure 2.4. They are suggestions to raise your awareness of non-verbal communication at work. You need to observe these norms as they occur in your own workplace. Then adapt as you see necessary.

Non-verbal Communication Tips >



Eyes

Make regular, short eye contact around the table when you talk to the group. Avoid staring at just one person. If it is a one-on-one conversation, make short regular eye contact as well. Avoid staring down. Short regular eye contact (2-3 sec) establishes trust.



Expression

Keep an open and friendly facial expression. Avoid frowning or looking too serious, unless the meeting tone is serious. Your colleagues want to know through your expression that you are open to them, not closed off, grumpy or aloof. Watch the expressions of colleagues to figure out the tone.



Gesture

Use arms and hands a little to strengthen and support your words and ideas. Don't point at people with your finger. Avoid very low gestures which are too passive. Low gesture refers to very little use of your hands, arms and body in communicating. Avoid very high gestures that are distracting. High gesture means using your hands, arms and body a lot in communicating.



Body Posture

Sit so that you always look attentive. Avoid folding your arms and leaning back for too long. Lean into the meeting more so that you look like you are listening and participating. It shows that you are interested and understand the discussion.



Dress

Each company has unwritten rules for how to dress at work. How formal or informal will depend on the company culture, the kind of work and your interaction with the public e.g. clients. Observe how your colleagues dress, if you are unsure. Also, take note of items like sock color, shoes, belts, make up, jewelry etc., which may seem insignificant, but can count towards your overall professional appearance.



Hand-held Devices

Put your cell phone on vibrate or turn to silent mode before the meeting. Put web devices away. Avoid texting or checking your phone during a meeting. If you are expecting an important message, let the chair of the meeting know beforehand. Sit near the door to slip out quietly. It is often considered rude to have a hand-held devices that interrupts a meeting.

Figure 2.4 Non-verbal Communication in Meetings

Unwritten Rule #9 Speak up

You are employed to speak up when you know, from your expertise and experience, that a decision is incorrect. You need to speak up when you disagree with ideas, opinions and courses of action.

You might originate from a workplace culture where subordinates usually don't disagree openly with leaders. In the Canadian workplace, you are required to speak up. If a mistake is made because you didn't speak up, you will be considered part of the problem. At the same time, speaking up requires the correct softeners. You may need to gain specific English and/or communication skills to speak up respectfully. See the section on "power" in Principle 3.

Some newcomers have faced career challenges because they didn't speak up. Decisions were made that cost their employers time and money, when they should have spoken up, sharing their expertise. At the same time, other newcomers have spoken up with too much assertiveness. To know how to speak up and use softeners, see Section 3 on consensus.



"It's a good idea to talk with coworkers during breaks about these concepts of speaking up, contributing and participating. They will have practical tips for you as well"

Unwritten Rule #10 Contribute

At most most team meetings, you are probably expected to contribute. It is rare that you should leave a team meeting without saying something e.g. an update, idea, opinion etc.

The norms for sharing might be different from your first workplace culture. Larger inter-team meetings might be different from smaller team meetings, and various team leaders could have different ways of chairing a team meeting. However, at team meetings, your colleagues probably need your ideas, opinions and updates. If most other team members are contributing, then you probably have something you should contribute, even if it's just to say "Everything is going well."

Take notice of the unwritten rules for meetings. Do people wait to be asked or do they just take turns randomly? Can you interrupt others, and how do you interject? How long is too long to talk? What are the topics? How do people discuss negative news or criticize? At the very least, ask good questions for anything you are uncertain about. Give brief updates on your project work, even if it is just to explain that everything is on track and on time. Observe and listen to your colleagues.

Unwritten Rule #11 Participate

Opportunities will open up for you to participate in workplace activities that are beyond your daily work duties e.g. volunteering in a fundraising campaign such as the United Way. You should take advantage of these opportunities to be more involved in your company. It is a great way to get to know more colleagues.

Choose opportunities that fit you the best. Participation could be a variety of different possibilities. It might be attending a company social event. Perhaps your work team has a BBQ. It might mean being part of a hockey "pool" during hockey season. Go with your colleagues to a hockey game. If you get invited for coffee at work, go - even if you drink tea. Don't stay on the outside at work. Get involved with events and people.

When you participate, other people get to know you as someone who wants to help out and belong. You meet more people and expand your friendships and acquaintances at work. People know your name, not just your face. You build a presence in the company. You develop trust with colleagues. In fact, some of your best career conversations might happen with colleagues outside of working hours. Participate where you feel you fit best.

PART 3
Principle 3

Become really good at working with difference



Difference is not only cultural but also in personality types. Principle 3 explains the importance of identifying and managing differences, not minimizing them. It explores basic cultural concepts such as body language and time. Intercultural communication will be explored as the crucial link in a multicultural workplace. It also takes an in-depth look at the role of power and hierarchy, and how they affect workplace expectations. It also introduces tools to understand personality types. Attention is also given to more sensitive topics such as touch, religion, politics and washroom etiquette.

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- ▶ Culture Box 3.1 Four career "musts"
- ▶ Culture Box 3.2 Gesture touch and space

Section 8 - Intercultural communication - the crucial link.

- ▶ Unwritten Rule #14 Understand power
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- ▶ Culture Box 3.4 Saving face

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- ▶ Unwritten Rule #16 Avoid knee-jerk reactions
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CASE STUDY

Integration in process

Sam

Sam came to Canada from South Asia to study for his Masters degree. He decided to stay in Canada and was hired as a junior project manager. Within a year, he had received his professional designation and was moved into a more senior project management role with more responsibility. His two main priorities were keeping projects on time and the clients happy.

Too Soft

Sam soon ran up against a wall. He was too soft with people not meeting deadlines. It was costing clients money. But Sam was not sure how to be more assertive. He asked his supervisor. The first option was a time management course. Sam attended a scheduling workshop, and finished a project management certificate. It worked. Sam suspected part of the problem was his own internal clock - the one he grew up with in his first culture. Sam wanted to know more about this, so he joined an English and intercultural training course offered through a local community college on Wednesday evenings at the company. His English was excellent but he suspected he would learn something he could find nowhere else.

Task vs Relational Focus

The sacrifice of Wednesday evenings was worth it. Sam learned everything he needed. He learnt about different cultural orientations to time. He had grown up with a cultural background where human relations came before time and deadlines. The Canadian workplace was more task-focused. This insight gave Sam the peace of mind to become more assertive on time issues.

In fact, he became good at working with both approaches to time, helping other newcomers on the team to adjust.

Power in “Softeners”

Although Sam was fluent in English, he didn't use it the way Canadians did to resolve performance issues with the people he supervised. In the workshops, Sam learned how to use “softeners” - more assertive word choices versus aggressive. Sam learnt the English phrases and words to work closely with Canadian colleagues, to set deadlines, and to follow up with them sooner to ensure they were going to meet those deadlines.

Hierarchy

Sam knew that the line “I am the supervisor so listen to me” was ineffective in the Canada workplace. Although it had worked in his first workplace culture, he learnt Canadians chose to supervise teams by empowering them, not by using their supervisor titles. He learnt in the workshops that cultures view hierarchy differently. In the Canadian workplace, there is less “power distance” between supervisors and their teams. Supervisors use suggestion and affirmation to get things done. They tend to use their title as the last choice of power. He also learnt to adjust his communication to more stronger assertiveness when working with other newcomers who were still expecting a much tougher supervisor. Sam would share his experiences with them. He mentored them to work with a less hierarchical leadership style. Sam was developing intercultural intelligence.



Source of Power

A year later, in a meeting with his own supervisor, Sam said “I know my professional designation, job title, position or status are not the main source of my credibility.” He had realized his influence in the Canadian workplace came from the right words and consistent work habits. “I have learnt to humbly listen to clients and other non-technical experts, and to value their contributions. I don't have to have all the solutions.”

Sam also realized people step into leadership roles, not necessarily because of strong technical skills or even age, but because they have good people skills. Good Canadian-style people skills. He recognized anyone can succeed if their people skills are good. That doesn't mean being soft with colleagues. It means using “softeners.” Sam also has another valuable skill set: intercultural intelligence, which will continue to be an advantage for him in the workplace.

Section 7 Identify the cultural differences. Build on the similarities.

What is culture?

Culture is best defined as norms, or tendencies. Norms are the behaviors we expect from a particular group of people. Culture is more than ethnic food, traditional costumes or languages, which are visible. Culture includes an invisible dimension as well, such as body language and other non-verbal behaviors. It also includes all the building blocks of culture that were explored in the previous section on intercultural communication.

When Canadians are working in another country, such as China or India, they can expect to experience certain behaviors and values that are distinctly Chinese or Indian. These are different to the Canadian workplace e.g. how hierarchy works, or how power is distributed between employees. At the same time, there are values that are universal, such as the human need to belong to community. However, don't overemphasize similarities, or minimize differences. Even American or British newcomers, whose cultures are closer to Canada's, soon realize there are cultural differences. Even though the Americans and British speak the same language as most Canadians, there is cultural distance that needs to be identified and closed.



KEY POINT - Cultural intelligence is a career “must” for everyone in a multicultural workforce. As a newcomer, it is one of four career “musts”.

Why cultural intelligence is important.

Developing cultural intelligence is important because:

- 1. Canadian workplace culture is not the same as your first workplace culture.** Canada has a unique professional workplace culture. You bring certain norms with you from your first workplace culture, your country of origin. These norms, such as your communication style, could limit your career opportunities. For example, if your communication style is more direct, it could limit your opportunities for leadership positions in a Canadian company. Subordinates would complain if your communication is too direct. You would need to learn how to use “softeners.”
- 2. Cultural intelligence will equip you to adapt.** The more you learn about another culture, the more your awareness is raised. You will begin to see differences where you were previously blind to them. You will be able to adapt your behavior and thinking so that they are more in harmony with norms in your workplace. Similarly, a Canadian, coming to work in your first culture, would need to adapt their norms in order to succeed in your first culture. By reading through this desk-reference, you are raising your awareness of culture so that you can easily identify those new norms in your Canadian workplace, and adapt to them.

One of the founders of Honda Motor Company once said Japanese and American management styles were 95 percent identical, but differed in all the important aspects. It is not hard to apply this idea to a newcomer's integration experience by saying the *Canadian workplace norms and those in other cultures are 95 percent the same but differ in all the important things*. All the readings, boxes and unwritten rules in this desk reference explore this all-important 5 percent difference.

CULTURE BOX 3.1 Four career “musts”

As a newcomer, you are a very valuable part of Canada's changing workforce. You also have a very unique set of career needs. You must:

1. Master workplace English.
2. Get really good at working with cultural differences.
3. Enhance your communications skills. Be clear, concise and coherent. Learn how to use softeners that build consensus.
4. Keep your technical skills up to date.

Don't aim for perfection or to be better than other people. Instead, always be better than you were yesterday. Be active in finding your own learning solutions. Don't simply wait for a teacher. Be as self-directed as possible. Get into a good mentoring program if your organization offers this. Take training when it's offered. Set your goals. Make sure your goals are specific. Use your time well. And above all, stay open to change. As a newcomer, you need to be a life-long learner.

Cultural norms are a departure point.

The knowledge in this desk reference is a departure point, not a blueprint to working in Canada. A departure point is an intellectual place to start understanding culture. A blueprint is an intellectual framework that works all the time. Cultural norms are neither fixed nor true all the time. They can change from one context to another. For example, we can suggest that Canadians value being clear, concise and coherent; yet this is not true of all Canadians all the time. Therefore, when learning about culture, we speak in terms of observable tendencies in Canadians, or Russians or the Chinese etc.

Culture is only one part of a person's identity. When dealing with differences, you need to consider wider diversity such as personality types, gender, language, province and community etc. Over-emphasizing culture could lead to stereotyping - an oversimplified image of a particular group of people, which is often negative and incorrect. At the same time the readings, boxes and unwritten rules in this desk reference are good observations. They were chosen because they were helpful to many newcomers across multiple organizations. Getting really good at working with cultural difference is important for you because:

1. The professional Canadian workplace has certain cultural norms that are reasonably easy to recognize and practice.
2. You are a newcomer - you were not here from the beginning to know those norms.
3. The workplace is multicultural - you work with other newcomers which adds another level of cultural complexity.
4. Research and experience show that many newcomers don't start their Canadian careers with enough cultural awareness.
5. Practicing cultural intelligence will make your work-life less stressful and more rewarding.

Culture is a powerful actor in the Canadian workplace; we are quintessentially one of the most multicultural workforces in the world. In fact, practicing cultural intelligence will have a positive effect on your relationships with coworkers and in your career opportunities. Yet, too often, too many newcomers take too long to realize cultural intelligence plays a decisive role in their futures in Canada.

Observations on adapting.

Between 2004 and 2008, over a thousand newcomers and Canadian-born employees were trained in projects that led to the development of this desk reference. The following general conclusions were made relating to observations of cultural adaptation:

- In about 80 percent of case studies - where employed newcomers experienced career challenges - culture was a key contributing factor.
- In many of those cases, the newcomers found it hard to accept that culture was the root cause of those challenges. In about 15 percent of the cases, the newcomers chose further education as the solution instead of adapting to new workplace norms. In those cases, education failed to open their career doors. Although further technical education is always useful, it was not effective in their cases. The career promotions they wanted required cultural intelligence and adaptation, together with language and/or communication training.
- The newcomers who gained cultural intelligence, made the adaptations, and enhanced their language and communication skills moved forward in their career opportunities. Their challenge was the same: accepting that culture, which seemed so irrelevant, was actually significant. The difference was that they accepted and acted on it.



Unwritten Rule #12 Find the mainstream workplace culture

Use the following suggestions to enable you to identify your workplace culture in Canada:

1. **Learning Resources** - Use the information in this desk reference to raise your awareness of cultural differences and similarities. Go online and do a search for more on developing intercultural intelligence.
2. **Time** - Identify the “organizational clock” e.g. take note of punctuality, the length of meetings, how much time is given for talking and updating, extending project deadlines, lunch and coffee breaks etc.
3. **Hierarchy** - Get comfortable with how power is used and shared in your team. Observe the behavior and listen to the words your coworkers use when talking to supervisors. Adapt to the power norm at work.
4. **Credibility** - Recognize how credibility is built and maintained in your organization. It will have a lot to do with your communication style, flexibility to learn and adapt, and being excellent at everything you do.
5. **Communication** - Take note of the clarity, conciseness and coherence in communicating information. Learn to use “softeners” to build consensus. Keep your accent, but make sure your pronunciation is clear. Be aware of intercultural communication - you work in one of the most multicultural workforces in the world.
6. **Attitude** - Develop an attitude by which you don't judge cultural differences good or bad. Learn to suspend your judgement. Accept that there can be very different, yet equally valid ways of doing the same thing. Don't minimize cultural differences. Use the skills you learn to adapt to new cultural norms.



How to build cultural intelligence

1. **Culture is invisible. See it.** People usually only think of one half of culture: what is “seen” e.g. different foods, traditional dress, religions, rituals etc. The more complex side of culture goes unnoticed. In fact, many people only experience life in one culture. Even if they travel abroad, their cultural encounter is at the level of “tourist”. They don’t need a sophisticated understanding of the more complex aspects of power, time and communication etc. Even people on international teams in a foreign country come to the end of their contracts and return to their native cultures. Their cultural encounters are short. Complex differences can often be ignored. As a newcomer to Canada, you are likely not returning anywhere. Canada is now home. You need a more sophisticated understanding of culture.

2. **Culture is powerful. Don’t minimize it.** When cultural differences cause friction between people, they tend to minimize those differences. They build on their human similarities to reduce conflict. Minimization can “moderate” differences, but it doesn’t remove them. At times, minimization can make a situation worse. If we assume that deep down inside everyone is the same as us, we force our values and beliefs onto others who hold different values and beliefs.



In addition, globalization has created the idea that cultures are becoming much more similar as technology brings countries together. On the contrary, globalization has made cultural diversity training one of the most important consulting services for transnational organizations and international teams. In fact, the Canadian government has an institute dedicated to building cultural competence in all foreign service workers before they leave on assignments. Cultural intelligence is now a prerequisite for all Canadian soldiers leaving for tours in foreign countries. Getting really good at working with difference is a “must” for the workplace.

3. **Culture hides. Find it.** Using this desk reference is a beginning for finding the culture of your workplace. Culture is like a blind spot in a car mirror - you have to look hard to find it. When you drive a car, you have blind spots in the side mirror. They cause so many accidents that some people put a small extra lens onto their side mirrors to get rid of the blind spot.

Edward T. Hall, a father of modern intercultural studies explained culture in the following way: *culture hides much more than it reveals, and what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants.* Hall was saying that if you think culture is not important, it is because you can’t see its effects on you. To start, culture can be found in our gestures. In how we use space. In our communication. We find it in our use of time. In the role of power, or hierarchy, at work. Moreover, cultural intelligence adds an extra lens to your human interactions so that you can know if an issue is cultural or because of language gaps, personality types or other factors.

Section 7 Identify the cultural differences. Build on the similarities.

CULTURE BOX 3.2 Gesture. Touch. Space.

Two participants were talking during a coffee break in a training workshop - Abdi, from the Horn of Africa, and Chen from China. Abdi kept touching Chen's on the arm as he talked. Chen kept taking a step back to regain his personal space, upon which Abdi took a step forward. They "danced" from one side of the room to the other during the coffee break, not realizing cultural difference was the music they were dancing to. How we use our bodies in gesture, how we smile, make eye contact or even laugh are mostly culturally defined. Canadians are often quick to smile, even to strangers. In some European cultures, if you smile at a stranger on the street, they will think you are crazy. One Asian culture has 13 different kinds of smiles each with a different meaning. Personal space and touch are also cultural habits. Gesture, touch and space are building blocks of culture.

Touch can be one of the most controversial topics in the workplace. In some cultures, men and women don't touch outside of marriage. They don't even shake hands. You need to notice the boundaries for touch at work and stay within those limits. In many cultures, people will touch a person's arm or hand while talking to the person. Personal space is also important. The general rule is avoid touching people unless they initiate socially acceptable touch such as a handshake or pat on the back. Remember that you work in a multicultural workplace. Many other cultures may not have the same sensibilities or habits for touch and personal space as your culture. Watch, learn and adjust.

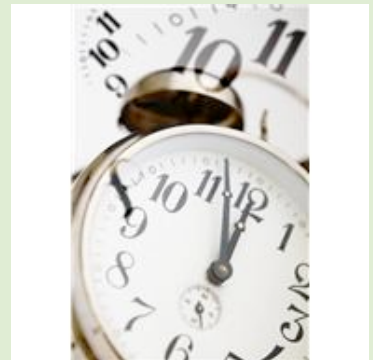


Unwritten Rule #13 Stay on your organization's clock

You have an "internal clock" for how you use your time. It is both cultural and personal. Your organization also has a clock. It's more than just punctuality. It includes how to schedule tasks, manage interruptions, set aside time for people, meet or extend deadlines, or even the time to explain something and give updates etc. Open your eyes and ears to find the time patterns in your organization. Ask coworkers what they think. And then get on the "organization's clock." Take note of how time is used in following :

- **Punctuality.** When do coworkers arrive for various kinds of meetings? What time do they arrive at and leave work? How much overtime do they put in?
- **Deadlines.** The tolerance for extending deadlines i.e. hours, days, weeks or months? And the consequences to the employee's credibility and trust.
- **Interruptions.** What are the acceptable reasons for interrupting coworkers while they are working?
- **Multitasking.** Do people do fewer or many tasks tasks at one time?
- **Quality Control.** Find the balance between doing a great job without being late.

Adjust your own internal clock whenever it is not "on time" with how your workplace uses time. Then stay on that "organizational clock" as you manage your time, tasks and relationships at work. Your internal clock may even be a religious clock. There might be set times to pray each day. Your workplace will usually accommodate certain time obligations, such as religion. Other cultural norms for time might not be accommodated. Is time related to efficiency and money? Is time related to relationships? You need to find out what the right balance is in your workplace.



Section 8 Use intercultural communication. It's the crucial link

What is intercultural communication?

- An ability, made up of two words: intercultural i.e. between cultures, and communication i.e. the act of speaking.
- Accepting that there are other cultural communication styles, equally valid but different to one's own.
- Openness to adapting to other cultural communication styles.
- An awareness of body language and other non-verbal aspects of communication, such as emotion and volume etc.

Why it's important

Developing intercultural communication skills is essential for working effectively in the Canadian workplace for the following reasons:

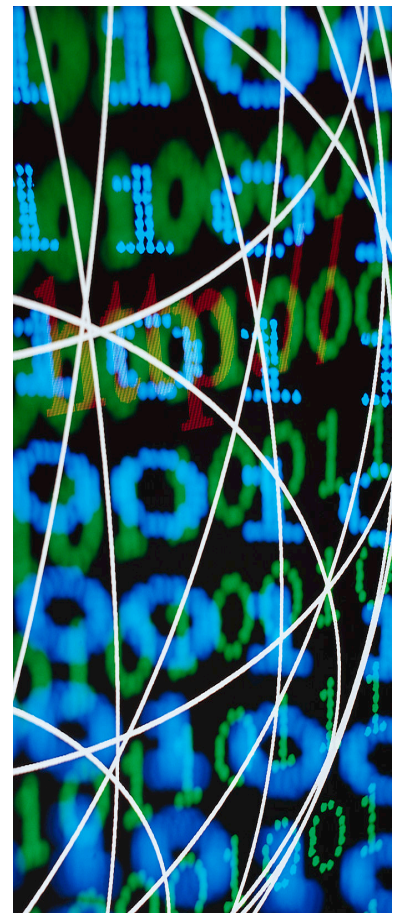
1. **Adapting to the Canadian context.** There is a Canadian communication style i.e. being clear, coherent, concise with consensus. You need to understand and use it in the workplace. If you don't adapt to this communication style, your communication will be misinterpreted. Remember that most Canadians are not aware you bring a different cultural communication style. Cultural communication styles are not what people typically think about. If you use the communication from your first culture, Canadians will not interpret it as intercultural. They will likely assume it is low English skills or personality type etc. Aim to add new communication skills to your existing communication style; you don't replace the communication skills from your first culture and language.
2. **Adapting to the multicultural workplace.** You also work with colleagues from other cultures. The Canadian workplace is one of the most multicultural in the world. Their cultural communication styles are synchronized with their first languages. Those styles often carry over into English. They may speak fluent English, but their communication styles might still be from their first languages and cultures. They may not have adapted to the style in your Canadian workplace. It is easy to misattribute unfamiliar cultural behaviors and words to the wrong causes like personality differences, incompetence, or work ethic. At the very least, with a good understanding of intercultural communication, you will not be easily offended by cultural differences. It will enable you to understand the style and motivations of others better.

Return on Investment

By practicing intercultural communication, you can avoid misunderstanding other people's words, or misattributing their behaviors, when no confusion or offense was meant. In addition, you can also avoid being misunderstood. You will build stronger working relations with colleagues and gain respect in your speaking skills.



KEY POINT - As a newcomer, intercultural communication means adjusting your communication style to your Canadian workplace. You add new skills; you don't replace the communication skills from your first culture and language.



How intercultural communication works

Intercultural communication requires at least two elements: knowledge of various communication styles and a willingness to adapt, along with empathy and suspending judgement.

1. **Knowledge of various styles of intercultural communication.** Principle 2, Section 1 explored the Canadian Communication Style. Then, Section 2 explored the Canadian use of “softeners” in contrast to a more direct communication style. In this section, we will explore the direct style in contrast to the Canadian style (Table 3.1 and Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Table 3.3 compares three more dimensions of intercultural communication: linear versus circular, emotionally-detached versus attached, and low versus high self-disclosure. Read on.
2. **Willingness to adapt.** This starts with recognizing that there are different cultural ways of communicating. Willingness comes from recognizing that these other communication styles are equally valid, despite being different or unfamiliar to you. This requires you to suspend judgement i.e. don't judge the person's words and behaviors good or bad. Ask yourself, “What's up? Could it be a cultural thing?” You might be offended where no offense was intended. Then, you adapt your own behaviors and words accordingly. Most importantly, you need to adapt to the communication style of your workplace. The mainstream way of communicating in your workplace is the best one to adapt to. In most professional Canadian workplaces, the style is clear, concise and coherent with consensus. It is also usually the best style to use when you speak to other newcomers because it is one everyone is expected to use.

You can adapt to the Canadian communication style by applying the following suggestions:

- **Raise your awareness.** Use this desk reference to raise your awareness of cultural differences.
- **Identify workplace norms.** Identify the norms of the communication style of your Canadian workplace. Listen to and watch your Canadian-born colleagues, and other newcomers who have adapted. Notice any differences between their communication styles with a subordinate, peer and supervisor.
- **Compare and contrast.** You make a comparison between your first language and English in how you would give opinion, get people to do things, point out colleagues' errors. Think how your communication style might change with a subordinate, peer and supervisor.
- **Show empathy.** This is the ability to understand, share and appreciate the feelings of another person. Empathy is essential for trust and rapport in the workplace.
- **Suspend judgment.** Avoid judging other communication styles good or bad. Consider the motivations of those styles. Observe how they work on your team.
- **Apply what you learn.** Practice the clarity, coherence, conciseness and consensus norms.
- **Don't oversimplify.** Know that communication styles are tendencies. They dominate most of the time, not always.

CULTURE BOX 3.3 Silence. Noise. Turn Taking.

Every workplace has a preferred noise level of human communication. Listen for it. Notice how loud people tend to speak and adjust your own loudness. In a few cultures, it is important to speak loudly so that people don't think you are talking about them. In some cultures people talk loudly to include others in the conversation. On the other hand, in some cultures, shouting at others from a distance is rude. Some languages are spoken more softly than others. Listen to find the right volume level and adjust yourself. Also, be aware of when and how speakers take turns and interrupt others. In the Canadian workplace, it is essential to allow others to finish speaking. Avoid cutting speakers off in the middle of speaking, and only interrupt when it is an advantage for your team. Learn by observing.



Section 8 Use intercultural communication. It's the crucial link.

Example 1. Direct Communication - how intercultural communication is the crucial link.

Speakers 1 and 2 from the Table below demonstrate two very different communication styles. Speaker 1 is very direct because he doesn't use softeners. Speaker 2 is focused more on building consensus by using softeners. Neither style is better, but rarely does either style work well with the other.

When the two styles interact, they can easily misunderstand and judge each other's motivations. In your workplace, you will interact with people from both styles because the Canadian workplace is multicultural. There are also situations where one style is better than the other. As you become more aware of communication styles in your workplace, you will sense which communication style works best in various situations. At times, you need to trust your intuition. At other times, it is better to rely on the Canadian (consensus) communication style because it is the mainstream style in the workplace.

In addition, certain newcomers to Canada may use a third style - indirect communication (see Table 3.1 below for a short description, and the workbook for more information on all three styles).

Example A - Direct Communication Style (no "softeners")	Example B - Consensus Communication Style (with "softeners")
<p>Speaker 1 - I think we need to set up an official intercultural advisory committee in our organization.</p>	<p>One option we could consider is to set up an intercultural advisory committee.</p>
<p>Speaker 2 - I don't think that is the answer, John. We don't even know what the real issues are or what is causing them.</p>	<p>John, I am not sure I follow. Could you explain a bit more?</p>
<p>Speaker 1 - Teri, an intercultural advisory has worked for other organizations. I think we need to move on this option soon.</p>	<p>I am not sure what everyone else thinks but an intercultural advisory seems to have worked for a few other organizations. It is something we should perhaps consider as a first move.</p>
<p>Speaker 2 - You are wrong, I think. What works in one company won't necessarily work in another. Before we look at solutions, let's figure out the root causes.</p>	<p>I hear what you are saying, but we should probably consider some kind of assessment to identify the root causes of what is going on.</p>
<p>Speaker 1 - My field of expertise is intercultural studies so I know what I am talking about. And second, an intercultural advisory committee is always good for any organization, such as ours, defined by diversity. I speak from first-hand experience. I was part of an intercultural committee with a previous employer.</p>	<p>From my experience, an intercultural advisory committee is often good for any organization, such as ours, defined by diversity. I say this because I had opportunity to be part of an intercultural committee with a previous employer.</p>

Table 3.1 Comparing Direct Communication with the Consensus Style

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Read through Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below. They summarize the styles and the thoughts that Speakers 1 and 2 (from Table 3.1) have about each other.


Speaker 1 Direct Communication Style	
<p>Description more direct, frank and assertive</p>	<p>True Motivation to avoid misunderstanding and error by being explicit</p>
	<p>He thinks Speaker 2 sounds uncertain, unforthcoming, insincere; the style lacks clarity on the issues, and has a hidden agenda</p>

Figure 3.1 A Summary of Speaker 1


Speaker 2 Consensus Communication Style	
<p>Description less direct, more discrete and guarded</p>	<p>True Motivation to be open to unexpected unknown facts and emerging ideas; to avoid discrediting someone by being relational, constructive, acknowledging, persuasive and inclusive</p>
<p>She thinks Speaker 1 sounds abrupt, too confrontational, opinionated, disruptive, controlling and excluding; the style is tactless, disrespectful, and is closed to discussion</p>	

Figure 3.2 A Summary of Speaker 2



CULTURE BOX 3.4 Face saving

Saving face has to do with saving reputations - yours and mine. In some cultures, face-saving is practiced more than in others. Tradition in these cultures say “it is better to die than to lose face”. For example, people will avoid being direct about another person’s mistakes in order to save face (save reputations and limit embarrassment). They might avoid asking questions that show they don’t understand, or that the speaker didn’t explain properly. In these cultures, to be frank, or direct, is disrespectful. Being frank is equated to having bad communication skills.

However, in more direct cultures, being indirect and trying to save face is seen as insincere. Losing face is not as damaging to reputation, as long as persons learn from their mistakes. Alternatively, some cultures have little tolerance for error, which means fewer mistakes are made, and therefore “losing face” is not such a common issue. In the Canadian workplace, making a mistake is not as bad as denying the mistake or not taking responsibility for it. You must ask when you are unsure. You should speak up when you have updates, ideas and opinions to add to the team.

Example 2. Personal Disclosure - how intercultural communication is the crucial link

By developing your understanding of intercultural communication, you can avoid misunderstanding the intentions of colleagues from other cultures. Read the following case study that explains “personal disclosure”, one of the dimensions of intercultural communication. Personal disclosure is defined as the amount of personal information a person shares with coworkers. In some cultures, people share a lot of personal information; in other cultures, like Canada, people share very little.

Case Study - Paulo came to Canada from Central America. He took a job in engineering. On the first day that he met his manager, he told him that his father was a political prisoner back in his first country. The supervisor was surprised by how much personal information Paulo had shared. Paulo’s openness about his personal life was intended as an invitation to get to know him better. It was meant to build rapport. It did the opposite. The manager wasn’t used to knowing so much personal information about employees. He assumed Paulo was telling him such personal information to get sympathy, or preferential treatment. The crucial link between supervisor and subordinate was broken. Their relations became, awkward. If they had both had cultural intelligence, they would have clearly understood the true motivations.

In the Canadian workplace, higher personal disclosure is kept for a very few close work friends. Often, it is avoided completely. A person might share some weekend activities with colleagues, such as a trip to the mountains or other family activities. However, more personal information, for example problems at home or with friends, family or money, are shared with very few colleagues. In fact, usually with no one at work. Other cultures have higher personal disclosure. In fact, letting colleagues into one’s personal life is a way to build relationship with people and establish mutual trust.

Unwritten Rule #14 Understand power

The Canadian workplace is less hierarchical than many other workplaces in the world. There is little difference between supervisors and subordinates. Supervisors are not called by their titles or last names. They do not dress differently to other employees. They expect subordinates to make many decisions independently. In fact, in some Canadian workplaces, it is difficult to identify the supervisor from their subordinates. The difference in authority and influence between supervisors and subordinates is called “power distance.” This low “power distance” in the Canadian workplace, between supervisor and subordinate, has a strong affect on communication; it makes consensus and “softeners” essential for respectful interaction between coworkers.

You can gain power i.e. influence and respect, by using a Canadian communication style. Power is not simply ascribed to you because of your education, expertise, age or seniority. The words you choose and how your order them is often more important than having perfect spoken-grammar. Develop a communication style that is clear, concise and coherent. Use softeners to build consensus when you communicate. These increase trust and respect for you as a professional. Be aware of the other communication styles of coworkers from other cultures. This desk-reference is trying to bring these intercultural concepts to your attention so that you can decide what is important to adjust.

Hofstede’s Study. A number of studies have been done to measure the power distance between cultures. The most famous research has been done by Geert Hofstede, who measured the power distance of IBM employees in over 50 countries. Table 3.2 is list of 24 countries from Hofstede’s Power Distance Index (PDI). The 24 PDI scores are compared with the PDI score of English-speaking Canada at the top in red. The higher the score, the more hierarchical the workplace culture tends to be. Hofstede’s numbers are relative, not absolute positions of countries. A Google search will give you more detailed information.

Power Distance Index	
PDI Canada	39
Philippines	94
Russia	93
Romania	90
Mexico	81
Venezuela	81
Arab Countries	80
China	80
India	77
West Africa	77
Vietnam	70
Brazil	69
Hong Kong	68
Poland	68
Columbia	67
Turkey	66
East Africa	64
Korea	60
Iran	58
Pakistan	55
Canada Quebec	54
Argentina	49
South Africa	49
United States	39
Netherlands	38

Table 3.2 Hofstede’s Power Distance Index

TABLE - The Building Blocks of Intercultural Communication Styles

Intercultural communication is more than just direct or indirect communication. Table 3.3 summarizes direct and indirect, and then explores three more aspects of communication that can be influenced by culture.

The definitions in Columns A and B are opposites. Cultures tend to prefer either Column A or B. Canadian workplace communication tends to be more linear, more emotionally-detached. Self-disclosure tends to be low. However, to say this is always true is an oversimplification of any culture. Communication styles are influenced by other factors, such as context and personality, not just culture. Use the table of opposites to raise your awareness of difference communication styles.

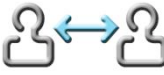



Column A		Column B
<p>Direct I mean what I say. I say what I mean. Yes means yes. "Saving face" is not important. Don't be offended - it's not personal - it's just work. To be frank is to be respectful of the facts and to avoid confusion, or avoid misleading you*.</p> <p><small>*Canadians tend to start with suggestions and softeners before being very direct.</small></p>		<p>Indirect I suggest. I imply. So "read between the lines" and watch my body language as well. Yes could mean maybe or no. "Saving face" is important - it keeps our reputations intact and maintains harmony between us.</p>
<p>Linear I talk in a straight line*. I get to the point quickly. My points are explicit and stay on topic. I am efficient, time-focused. I am clear, concise and coherent.</p> <p><small>*Canadians tend to value clarity, conciseness and coherence.</small></p>		<p>Circular I talk around the point, which may not be stated explicitly. I may move on and off the main topic as I develop the context. I might include personal stories and seemingly irrelevant details. Every fact occurs within a bigger context that you need to understand as well. I am people-focused.</p>
<p>Emotionally Detached I separate myself from the issues*. I am objective and work with little emotional connection. If something is important, it shouldn't be distorted by personal feelings.</p> <p><small>*This doesn't apply to situations when employees experience a personal tragedy or accident. Being empathetic to coworkers is important.</small></p>		<p>Emotionally Attached If it's important, I am both intellectually and emotionally engaged. If it's worth being passionate about, to feel it. To express that feeling. If I have an interest in the outcome, how could I separate myself from it?</p>
<p>Low Self-Disclosure I keep my personal life mostly separate from my work life. I build rapport with colleagues as we work together to accomplish a task. I prefer to keep most of my personal information to myself. Building very close friendships at work usually takes time.</p>		<p>High Self-Disclosure I talk a lot at work about my personal life. Other people have life lessons that can help me in my life. By being more open about our lives, we build rapport together.</p>

Table 3.3 The Building Blocks of Intercultural Communication Styles

Section 9 Know other types.

What are other types?

To get really good at working with cultural difference, you should also have a good understanding of personality types. People often confuse issues that are actually cultural with other aspects of diversity, such as personality, gender or language.

Every person is unique, yet also similar to other persons. The social sciences support the idea that people belong to broad personality types. Types are naturally occurring differences between people. Types explain how people understand the world and make decisions. For example, some people are more extroverted, meaning they get their energy from working in groups and know lots of people. Others are more introverted and prefer doing things alone or in small groups. A number of personality type tools have been developed in the social sciences, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Strengths Development Inventory (SDI), and True Colors. Many are used in the workplace to equip people to work well in teams.



KEY POINT - Cultural differences are best understood in their relationship to other aspects of diversity. It helps avoid oversimplification. You appreciate the amazing complexity of each person.

Why personality types are important

Tools for understanding personality type indicators are useful for understanding the actions and motivations of your coworkers. They can reveal tendencies in people - behaviors that occur often in certain contexts. More than this, a good understanding of personality types will enable you to recognize when an issue between people is cultural, personality or something else. It will help you better understand the motivations of people at work, and avoid misunderstandings.

Return on Investment

As with any growth in understanding human diversity, the return on investment occurs in improved human relationships, fewer misunderstandings and less friction between people.

How to use Personality Type Tools

As mentioned, a number of personality type tools have been developed in the social sciences, such as MBTI, SDI and True Colors. Most tools require a trainer to guide you through them, at a cost. A Google search will usually provide you with a basic introduction to the tools. This desk reference will give you an elementary introduction to the Strengths Development Inventory (SDI). To use any of the tools with skill, you should participate in a workshop with a qualified trainer who can equip you to use them properly.



Section 9 Know other types.

Introduction to the SDI Tool

Personal Strengths Publishing, at www.personalstrengths.com, is the company behind the SDI tools. Information about where the SDI assessment can be accessed, along with the costs, are available on the county-specific webpages. The Globe and Mail published a short article on the SDI that helped form the outline of this summary of the SDI. The article can be accessed online through a Google search for “Getting to the Roots of Office Conflict” by Harvey Schachter. The SDI catalogues seven color-coded motivational drivers in human relationships that we should be aware of. Schachter’s article provides definitions for all seven. We will only briefly explore the first three SDI types - Assertive, Altruistic and Analytic - with some expansion on each from personal experience. See Table 3.4 below.

Assertive	Altruistic	Analytic
Directs others. Competes. Likes action now. Opportunistic. High tolerance for risk. Mistakes are learning opportunities.	Nurtures others. Open and emotionally engaged. Responsive and helping. Accommodating. Values and supports others. Mistakes must not hurt people.	Autonomous. Cautious and emotionally-detached. Objective and principled. Thorough. Risk averse. Mistakes are to be avoided.
Commanding - concern for task accomplishment, and organization of people, money or whatever to achieve desired results.	Helping - focused on the protection, growth and welfare of others.	Analyzing - concern for assurance that things have been properly thought out, and desire for the maintenance of meaningful order.

Table 3.4 Introduction to three SDI Types

Schachter in his review of the seven SDI types, says that each of us may have a different blend than these exact motivations. The key point is these motivations lead us into conflict with others. He says that each of us is trying to do the “right thing” at work according to our motivations, but our “right thing” may be the “wrong thing” to another person.

Example.

The **Assertive** type wants to take hold of business opportunities immediately. The **Altruistic** type is concerned about how the action will affect people on the team. The **Analytic** type is cautious, concerned that the decision is too impulsive; time is needed to think through the pros and cons.

The **Assertive** type is annoyed with the **Analytic** type because the opportunity will be lost if intuition is not used and action taken now. The **Altruistic** type instinctively steps in to make peace between the other two types.

The following page will apply these three SDI types to cultural orientations so that you can recognize the difference between personality and cultural norms. In addition, review Figure 3.3, which provides an overview of the differences between personality, culture and human nature.



Section 9 Know other types.

Comparing Culture and Personality

The following case study gives an example of how important it is to know the difference between cultural and personality types.

Case Study - Yasmeen came to Canada from Central Asia, completed a graduate degree in engineering, and then gained work in her profession.

She had done really well in her studies. In fact, her personality was oriented towards detail and continuous improvement through formal learning. Within two years of being employed, she achieved her professional engineering designation. She was eager to apply her knowledge to more senior level work. However, a key issue was preventing her from moving ahead in her career, namely meeting deadlines. Yasmeen rarely finished her project work on time. Clients and team members often had to wait for her work. This increased costs to projects, friction on the team, and undermined the credibility of the organization with the clients.

Her department head didn't know what was causing Yasmeen to miss her deadlines. A few coworkers believed that her lateness was just a bad personal habit, that her work ethic was low. However, her department head had a good understanding of human diversity and suspected that her missing deadlines was either due to her cultural orientation to using time or to her personality type.

He had Yasmeen and the entire team, participate in a diversity training workshop, and take the personality assessment. He also had a one-on-one meeting with Yasmeen and asked her questions about how time was used in her first culture. Through the workshop, the personality assessment and the interview, it was clear that culture was not the cause of the issue with time. Yasmeen came from a workplace culture where time was used in a similar way to the Canadian workplace. In addition, Yasmeen had worked for an American multinational company in her first country and understood the mainstream North American use of time.

Yasmeen was missing deadlines because her personality type was extremely analytical. She took a lot of time to make sure her work was perfect. She would often get stuck trying to decide which option to take in a project task. She was very self-critical. her department head worked with Yasmeen to build her confidence in her work through praise and recognition. She worked with a mentor to pre-assess the level of quality each aspect of her work required. She started to put her energy into the right activities and her deadlines were met. Sometimes performance gaps are due to culture and other times personality.

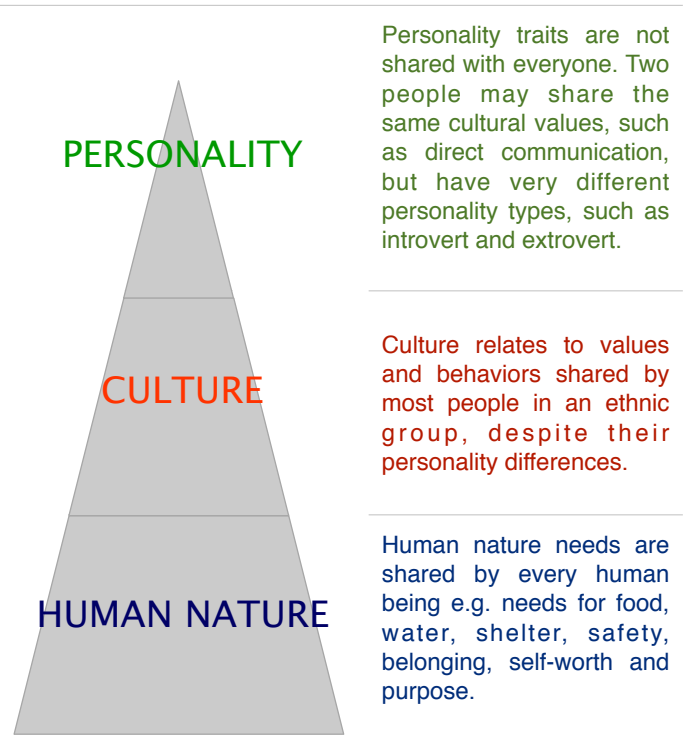


Figure 3.3 Comparing Personality, Culture and Human Nature



Unwritten Rule #15 Integrate - don't isolate.

Belonging in the workplace is an essential part of integration. However, many newcomers tend to isolate themselves. They try to remain "invisible" in the workplace. They avoid speaking English if possible. Instead, they speak their first language to colleagues from the same first language, in the workplace. They worry about making grammar mistakes when speaking English, or not being understood by English speakers. They rarely start a conversation with a Canadian. They say nothing when others are talking. Newcomers don't realize that many Canadian colleagues take notice when a newcomer does try to use English. They notice the courage it takes to try to use English. At work, using English, the language of the country you chose to immigrate to, makes you look good. It helps you belong. Don't be embarrassed or worried about "losing face." It is a good human quality to show you are trying to grow in something you are not perfect in yet. Canadians notice it. They notice when you try to integrate. It is good for your career. They also notice when you use your first language, instead of English, and when you isolate yourself. No one will ever say anything to you about this. It is your human right to choose how you act at work. However, if you try to integrate versus isolate, the value that you bring to the Canadian workplace will be obvious.

Top Ten Integration Strategies - Read and apply the following list of top 10 ways to integrate more intentionally.

1. Show a real desire to learn, to be flexible and to adapt
2. Resolve to use only English at work
3. Be unafraid of making mistakes
4. Learn from your mistakes quickly
5. Ask when you don't know
6. Contribute your skills and ideas at meetings
7. Grow in your cultural intelligence
8. Socialize with same-language colleagues in English
9. Participate in at least a few social events at work
10. Think in English, but find a comfortable balance between English and your first language.

CULTURE BOX 3.5 Personal grooming and other really sensitive topics no one will talk about

Breath. Body odor. Personal grooming. These are really sensitive topics to talk to people about in the workplace. People are often not aware that something is making relationships awkward at work. These suggestions may not even apply to you, but be aware of them.

If you eat lots of garlic in your food, brush your teeth regularly. If you are meeting with people, chew gum or use mouthwash. Also, know that strong smells like garlic can escape through your skin pores. Not everyone enjoys the smell in the workplace. Colleagues may avoid you because of this. If you feel offended by this, imagine if the roles were reversed - how would you react to a coworker who had a strong body odor? If you cook with strong spices at home, close the doors to your closets and bedroom to prevent the smell from entering your work clothes. At the same time, limit how much perfume or deodorant you use. A number of people are allergic to these smells. They get headaches or even feel nauseous. Try to smell neutral. If you do get bad breath easily, or have strong body odor, do more internet searches for how to limit these.

You may think personal grooming is obvious, but sometimes cultural or personal experiences can shape our norms. Observe the habits of your coworkers. Every workplace is slightly different in what is acceptable, but the following generalizations can help. Keep fingernails short and clean. Shave or keep your facial hair tidy. Keep your hair clean and tidy. Iron the clothes that people see. Dress similar to your peers at work. Don't wear white socks to work, keep your shirt tucked in and shoes clean, and keep jeans out of the office. All of these suggestions come out of personal experience or from other newcomers. They are in no way directed at any culture, gender or person. They are given as one newcomer to another.

Section 10 Understand power.

What is power in the workplace?

Power in the workplace is the degree of influence and control a person has within their team and organization. It is one of the most culturally-driven workplace realities. The intercultural term is “power distance” - the amount of authority and influence a subordinate has compared to a supervisor, and vice versa. In the Canadian workplace, your base of power rests in the right balance between your technical and enabling skills. Power is earned by you from others, not automatically ascribed to you because of your role, seniority, experience, education, qualifications or responsibilities. If you misunderstand this, sooner or later career opportunities and promotions will be limited.

Why understanding power is important.

Understanding power in the workplace is important for the following reasons:

1. You bring beliefs about power from your first workplace culture that may not fit in your Canadian workplace. How you understand power will determine how you communicate with seniors and subordinates. It will determine how much initiative you believe you can take. This is often one of the most important adaptations newcomers need to make.
2. Your power - influence and control - depends on your credibility with colleagues. Credibility comes from the right balance between enabling and technical skills. Power rarely depends on your position in the chain-of-command. Employees with a lower position can suddenly have a lot of power when circumstances call for their skills, knowledge or attitudes.

Return on Investment.

By investing your time in learning more about power distance, you can build your workplace credibility in a way that will give you respect and trust from your colleagues.

How to enhance your influence and control.

1. **Find balance between expertise and enabling skills** - Recognize that your influence and control at work depends on two habits: managing your expertise well, and continuously expanding your enabling skills. You must understand the inter-play between these two as they occur in your Canadian workplace. Don't try to impose the hierarchy blueprint you brought with you from your first country. It doesn't fit, and neither will you if you do. Even if the workplace cultures between your first country and Canada are 95 percent the same, they will differ in many important aspects. Identifying and adapting to that other 5 percent could make or break your career opportunities and workplace relationships.
2. **Understand the “weight” of education and experience** - Education is key for being employed in your field. Ongoing learning is essential for staying technically up-to-date in your profession. In fact, learn continuously - it is a core Canadian workplace value. However, once employed, if you try to use the educational “letters after your name” to gain influence, control or respect, you won't get far. Some Canadians don't even put their credentials in their email signatures, unless the recipient, such as a client or supplier, doesn't know them yet.



KEY POINT - Your own base of power in the workplace rests fully in the right balance of your technical and enabling skills, not in your position in the chain-of-command.

Unwritten Rule #16 Avoid knee-jerk reactions

Have you ever had the doctor tap your knee to check your reflexes? The knee automatically jerks forward. Don't let your emotions and words jerk forward if you are frustrated with your new workplace culture.

When someone says or does something that you find annoying or rude, the best thing to do is to step back in your mind. Suspend judgement. Look at the situation without emotion. Ask yourself “What's up? Could it be a cultural thing?” Even if it really annoys you, suspend judgement. You might be offended where no offense was intended. It could be a cultural misunderstanding. Remember, you work in one of the most multicultural workforces in the world.

Section 10 Understand power.

In Canada, a university education is so accessible that it no longer gets the kind of prestige it once had, or that it still holds in some countries. Once employed, what matters is what you produce daily with that education and how your own results enable your colleagues to fulfill their responsibilities. Your former education and experience carry weight to get you a job, but once you are employed they will impress very few people. If you want more credibility or promotions, enhance your enabling skills. They combine with your education, experience and expertise to open the right doors for you. Ignore enabling skills and you will eventually get stuck. Instead, gain those core enabling skills, whether it takes a few months or a few years.

3. **Understand the supervisor-subordinate relationship** - You and your supervisor are part of a hierarchy. Organizations in every culture have hierarchies. A hierarchy is a system in which people are ranked one above the other according to their authority, status or responsibilities. Ranking creates “power distances” between people. We all have a model in our heads of the right and wrong ways for supervisors to behave, speak and dress. As a newcomer, you likely have two: a model of supervisors that originated in your first culture and another that is emerging as you work in the Canadian workplace. Make sure you have a strong understanding of the preferred style of supervision that is in your Canadian workplace. Leadership styles differ greatly across cultures. Even a small difference can be important.

The amount of power a supervisor or a subordinate has can be different between cultures, and even between various professions. For example, in the military, power belongs to superiors, according to the chain-of-command, and subordinates have very little power. In certain business cultures, supervisors hold most of the power. On the other hand, in the professional Canadian workplace, employees have a lot more control and influence compared to some workplace cultures. Supervisors are ultimately responsible for a team’s work, but they are appointed to help a team accomplish tasks and become better at them. Supervisors are tasked with enabling teams and building trust, not with controlling them. This means that team members need to have lots of initiative. They also need to find the boundaries to what they can do independently, through daily experiences.

CULTURE BOX 3.6 The elements of credibility

Credibility is the amount of respect and trust you have from your colleagues and clients. Through your credibility, you have influence and control in various situations and decision making. Credibility is earned. It is never ascribed by title, status or position. You are new to Canada, so be patient as you learn how to build credibility. Credibility in the workplace culture comes from combining strong enabling and technical skills. In the Canadian workplace, this combination tends to be about a 50-50 split. Great technical skills and strong enabling skills are a winning combination - but if you lack in either one, growing in credibility can be slow.

Top 8 Ways to Build Credibility - Make sure you work on the following core habits and skills:

1. Keep your technical skills up-to-date
2. Exceed job expectations
3. Be flexible and open to change
4. Master workplace English
5. Have clear, coherent and concise communication skills
6. Build consensus using “softeners”
7. Develop strong intercultural skills
8. Show a positive attitude to challenges



Expand Technical Skills

Exceed Expectations

Be Flexible

Master Workplace English

Be Clear Coherent Concise

Use Softeners

Build Intercultural Skills

Show a Positive Attitude

Section 10 Understand power.

In a “high power distance” culture, supervisors make most decisions. Employees might show respect to a superior by not questioning orders. They might use titles when speaking to their supervisors, or call them “boss”. Their first language will include specific words to show respect to a senior. Employees defer many decisions to that supervisor. They rarely disagree with their supervisor, or speak up when the supervisor is wrong. The supervisor-subordinate relationship is often one of dependence.

On the other hand, in a “low power distance culture” like the Canadian workplace, employees have a lot of influence. Supervisors are known by their first names. Supervisors expect everyone to contribute their ideas and expertise, to speak up when a mistake is going to be made, or even challenge decisions respectfully through suggestions or questions. The supervisor-subordinate relationship is often one of interdependence. See Table 3.5 for a summary.

4. Help your supervisor help you

Respect is at the centre of workplace culture. The best way to show respect to supervisors in the Canadian workplace is to help them help you. Take ownership of your day, your learning and your career development whenever possible. Learn quickly. Don’t sit waiting at your desk. Be involved in your day. Set yourself clear and achievable goals. Everything you do at work counts. It either moves you towards your career goals or away from them.

High Power Distance	Low Power Distance
Supervisors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tell subordinates • are called by their titles. • manage people. • make the decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask subordinates • are called by first names. • enable and resource people. • expect collaboration.
Subordinates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don’t question those decisions. • rarely disagree, never publicly. • usually defer to supervisor. • seldom take initiative. • wait to be told what to do. • depend on technical skills and supervisors for promotion. • need to have fewer career desires and be loyal to an organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a lot of influence in decision making. • question decisions respectfully. • take initiative. • find and ask what to do next. • use strong technical and strong “enabling skills” to get promoted. • need to be flexible in career, open to new opportunities and new employers.

Table 3.5 Comparing High and Low Power Distance

Unwritten Rule #17 Master English, even once you’re employed

Ultimately, only you know whether or not you have mastered enough English for work. Test scores can help, as well as compliments from peers or instructors. But only you know if you truly can think and understand in English. If you don’t have this confidence, don’t stop learning until you do master workplace English. Language limits will eventually limit your career.

Know this key insight: You are expected to master workplace English. Many newcomers gain employment with too little English. They assume that because they were hired, their employers have accepted their English skills as “good enough”. Actually, many employers hire newcomers with less than good English because they trust them to take ownership of their learning, identify their gaps, and get the training they need. This is often an unspoken expectation. Just because you were hired doesn’t mean you are fully qualified for the position. In Canada, the labour pool is shrinking due to an aging population. This opens more opportunities for newcomers who may have the technical skills but lack in certain enabling skills, like strong English. You could easily be hired, and no one will tell you your English, or other enabling skills are not strong enough. No one is going to tell you to develop them. Just because no one is saying anything, doesn’t mean no one sees the lack of confidence you feel. You need to take ownership of learning English. Don’t stop until you master it.

Use only English: When you use your first language in an English-speaking workplace work, you look incompetent. When you have conversations in your first language with coworkers from the same language, other colleagues will think you are talking about them. When you are determined to use English, even if you make a mistake, people will admire you. Use your first language when it is an advantage, such as translating for others in the workplace. You can’t lose your first language. It is part of your family heritage. However, you have too many years ahead of you in Canada, in your career, to be satisfied with your current level of English or your communication skills. Persevere to learn English and be a strong communicator.

Section 10 Understand power.

CULTURE BOX 3.7 Eye contact

Eye contact differs from one culture to the next. In Canada, holding eye contact with the person(s) you are talking with is essential to show you are listening. This includes talking with a senior colleague or to a group of people in a meeting.

Keeping your eyes down, or not looking people in the eyes, gives the impression you are untrustworthy, disinterested, hiding something, or not confident. You also need to break eye contact about every 4 or 5 seconds. Look up, or to the side, as if you are remembering something. Don't stare too long into a person's eyes.

Take note of how other Canadians make eye contact. Be more aware of eye contact with colleagues from the opposite gender or other cultures - it is often tied to power and showing respect.



CULTURE BOX 3.8 Gift giving

Gift giving is a universal human norm. However, when and how and to whom a gift is given at work is culturally defined. For example, in certain cultures, giving your supervisor a gift or inviting your boss to your house for dinner is common. In Canada, it is uncommon, as is taking your team out for a meal and paying for everyone.

In the Canadian workplace, there are unspoken rules around gift giving, although this does depend on the kind of relationship between people. Sometimes close work colleagues will take turns in buying each other lunch, but often people will buy their own lunches. Turn taking between colleagues to buy coffee is common. It also common at times to bring in “treats” such as cakes or candies and leave them in the lunch room with a note telling people to enjoy the treats. Teams often celebrate birthdays; people usually share the cost of buying a cake. They will sing happy birthday and give everyone a slice of cake. To celebrate ethnic holidays, newcomers often bring in ethnic “treats” for co-workers to share in the celebration. At times, employees are encouraged to give small money donations or their time to volunteer for charities raising money to help people. Be aware of the “unwritten rules” of gift giving at work.

Section 10 Understand power.

Case Study 4 - Habib came from Central Asia to Canada. He had been a senior manager in a company but was unable to find similar work in Canada. Then he completed a bridging program that put him back into his career at the end of five months training. He had a work placement as a junior manager in a fast-growing company. The instructors in the bridging program were happy for him. Habib had been one of the best students in the program. He had attention to detail and was very pleasant with his instructors. He was expected to succeed. However, after a month, the company terminated his work placement suddenly.

A representative from the human resources department at the company gave the following two reasons for terminating Habib's employment. He was too directive with his subordinates. He was ingratiating with his own supervisor. Being directive means that Habib kept telling subordinates what to do, instead of using a low power distance management style (Table 3.5 on pg. 63). His team wanted to be trusted to work without his constant supervision. In the Canadian workplace, he needed to be more persuasive i.e. asking, suggesting, enabling, equipping etc.

Moreover, Habib was misunderstood as being ingratiating. He tried to get into a position of trust with his own supervisors by giving small gifts and inviting them to dinner at his house. This would have been very difficult for his supervisors to accept, and difficult for them to refuse without offending him. In the Canadian workplace, a supervisor must never show special favor to any employee. A supervisor must be objective. A supervisor must hold ultimate responsibility for projects, but must also release employees to work more independently. A supervisor guides, mentors, resolves difficult conflict, and supports the team whenever necessary. Power distance is important to understand. Cultural intelligence matters.



CULTURE BOX 3.9 Initiative

Initiative is the ability to assess a situation by yourself and then to make independent decisions on what to do. It means initiating activities independently, whenever you supervisor would simply tell you to go ahead and do them.

Initiative is one of the most important abilities for the Canadian workplace because there is not much power distance between supervisors and those they oversee. You are expected to lead yourself as much as you can. Everyone uses initiative in life. For example, you likely used initiative to immigrate to Canada. However, if you originate from a first culture with a more hierarchical management structure, you may not be used to using lots of initiative at work. It may take time to know when you should initiate and when you should first ask a supervisor.

Interviews with many supervisors across multiple professions in Canada suggests they look for two main qualities in a newcomer: first, a willingness to learn, and second, the ability to use initiative. Perfect English was rarely in the top 3 preferred skills. If you are willing to learn and have initiative, better English will naturally develop through working and learning. Figure out what you are permitted to do without asking and do it with excellence. Don't forget, the most important initiative you can take is to assume ownership of learning English. Don't depend on others to do it for you.



CULTURE BOX 3.10 Religion. Politics. Money.

Religious beliefs, just like income levels and personal political views, are kept mostly private in the workplace. Limited discussion on these topics helps colleagues avoid differences with strongly held opinions.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the public's right to religious expression. That being said, avoiding religious, political and money discussions, or limiting them to close colleagues, will express the corresponding value of balancing personal rights and personal responsibilities. Every Canadian has freedom of expression and beliefs, but is also responsible to avoid unnecessary conflict. Employers are required to accommodate religious customs such as prayer or time off work for religious celebrations and holidays, as long as it doesn't cause "undue hardship" for business i.e. financial loss, unmanageable workforce disruption or health and safety concerns. Undue hardship must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but most employers are happy to practice reasonable accommodation for religious practices. Just remember, it is up to you to request the accommodation.

Discussing salaries and money is also avoided in the workplace. Salaries are usually not negotiated, unless the company was trying to hire you specifically e.g. from another company. Usually, your salary is set according to a grid system. A salary grid is a table that could take the following structure: the number of years of experience along the horizontal rows, and years of education along the vertical rows. The Human Resources department will use your education and work experience to plot you on the company's salary matrix. You may ask for clarification on how your salary was set, but there will likely not be much chance to negotiate. Generally, Canada is not a negotiation culture.



CULTURE BOX 3.11 Washrooms and other sensibilities

These are sensitive topics. No one really wants to discuss this at work so let's be frank. Without any intent to disrespect any previous practices, it is suggested that you assume the following habits, if you don't already:

- Don't sniff and then swallow in public - blow your nose straight away, and if possible wash your hands to prevent the spread of germs.
- Public washrooms are places to keep clean, versus to clean yourself, meaning: spit in the toilet quietly, never in the sink. Blow your nose into a facial tissue or toilet paper, never into the sink or toilet. Always flush the toilet/urinal and keep the seat clean. Make sure any female sanitary products are disposed of in the trash, not the toilet. Wash your hands and throw the towel into the designated trash can. If necessary, request that a trash can be put near the washroom door to throw hand towel into, if you use it to open the door to break the bacteria chain.
- If you wash before prayer, work out the details of this process with your HR department so that it becomes integrated into typical washroom custom.
- If you cough or sneeze, try to do it into your sleeve if you have no facial tissue.

Master Workplace English



Mastering workplace English doesn't mean perfection. Rather, it means to be in command. To have a learning plan. To keep actively learning the language until it's yours. Principle 4 looks at the reasons and ways to take more responsibility for learning English. Then, eight strategies will be explored to make your English pronunciation clear while keeping your native accent.

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CASE STUDY

Integration in process

Yuri

Yuri immigrated to Canada from the eastern part of the European Union. He had a degree in criminal law and had worked in law enforcement in his previous country. However, in Canada, it seemed like an impossibility to get back into his previous profession. Yuri took a job in a private security company, but the work was uninteresting. It paid the bills while he upgraded his English. Then, Yuri found out that he could do a year-long diploma in law enforcement at a local university-college. He completed the program, finishing in the top three of his class, and was recruited back into a career in law enforcement. To pay off his student loan, Yuri put his name down on a list at his new job to pick up any additional shifts when someone was sick or on vacation.

The Problem

Yuri understood law enforcement well and his English skills were good. He had a strong academic background in reading and writing. He also could speak well and comprehend most communication. He was very likable.

But most of his colleagues could not understand him, especially when he spoke through the radio. Yuri's pronunciation was not clear. Within a few weeks, Yuri noticed he was getting passed over for any additional shifts. He was now working part time. He spoke with his supervisor to find out why. The supervisor was very frank about the issue. Yuri's pronunciation was unclear, which made two-way radio communication difficult with his team when they were in other parts of the building. It made the workplace unsafe since they were in charge of dangerous persons for most of the shift. If Yuri's pronunciation didn't become clear soon, he would likely be out of a job.

The Solutions

Yuri considered his options. He could not imagine a different career. He had worked too hard to achieve his goal. He decided he would aim to understand as much about pronunciation as he knew about law. He thought about who he knew in his network that could help him. He contacted an English instructor from his previous English language program. They met for coffee. Yuri explained his challenge and asked for advice. The instructor suggested two websites and a specific book to study. He also recommended a clear speech course for working professionals held at the language school. Yuri could not attend due to his shift work. Then the instructor offered to meet with Yuri for one hour over five Saturday mornings to help him clear his speech. As long as Yuri bought the coffee, the lessons would be free. The instructor also made it clear that Yuri had to take full ownership of changing. He didn't need to change his accent; rather, he had to change three speech habits. He spoke too fast in English, which made each word unclear. He needed to pause between his thought groups, especially on the radio. And he had to stop using unnecessary interjections, such as "um", "ah", "like", "kinda". This offer of help from a language expert changed Yuri's life forever.

Taking Ownership

But he didn't just rely on the coaching. He studied the pronunciation book and picked up a second book from the library. He also used his computer to record his voice and practice clearer pronunciation. He asked for feedback from trusted colleagues at work. Although Yuri needed some expert help, the solutions and determination to succeed had to begin and stay with him.



Section 11 Master English. Own it.

What does master mean?

Mastering English doesn't mean speaking English perfectly. Do you speak your first language perfectly? Do you know every word and could you pass a grammar test? Probably not. Mastering English has another more achievable meaning: to gain control over it. To own it. You take responsibility for setting learning goals, finding learning strategies, staying motivated and rewarding yourself for growth. Aim for achievable short-term goals that build on each other into real success.



Why mastering workplace English is important

1. **For career opportunities** - Your career opportunities are tied to your skills in English.

English may never feel like your first language, but it is the most powerful tool for your career path. That has effects on your family, your colleagues and your future.

2. **To show you are a learner** - The more your English improves at work, the more colleagues will notice. They will know you as a motivated learner who never gives up, which are qualities that will open career opportunities for you. Mastering English for work doesn't mean that you aim for perfection. In the workplace, your pronunciation needs to be clear and you should practice good oral communication skills. But less than perfect grammar, or not always finding the exact English word, will likely not limit your opportunities. More importantly, people who consistently grow and change are valuable in the Canadian workplace.

3. **Because just enough is not enough** - Mastering workplace English is important because having "just enough" English puts a burden on co-workers. Work that should come to you goes to them because your level of responsibility has peaked with your English skills. For example, if you have the expertise, you should speak to the client. But sometimes supervisors have to ask another member on the team to give a presentation to the client, instead of the newcomer. This is acceptable if it is clear that you are actively learning, and perhaps still lack confidence. However, if you have stopped learning the language, and show no interest, others need to take on tasks that should come to you.

4. **Because it's an unspoken employer expectation** - Mastering English for work is also an unspoken employer expectation. You may have been hired with "just enough" English for your current role, but your employer will expect you to want more complex responsibilities in the future. You will need English. Press into it.

5. **Because it's possible to have more than enough English** - Do your English skills feel "just enough"? There are many newcomers in the same situation. There are some newcomers with more English than you, but they have stopped learning. There are others with less English than you who will soon have more than you. Everyone is growing. Everyone is at different stages of the integration journey. Yet, the only person you are responsible for is you. Learning the language takes time. There are few short cuts.

KEY POINT - Mastering Workplace English doesn't mean perfection. Rather, it means to be in command. To have a learning plan. To rest when you need to. But to keep actively learning the language until it's yours.

CULTURE BOX 4.1 Busting the perfect grammar myth

Many newcomers believe that they need perfect grammar before they can speak with confidence in the workplace. In written correspondence, good grammar is important. If you are ever unsure about your grammar, ask a colleague to help write it correctly. However, for speaking, there is more flexibility. It is better to speak than to be silent when everyone on your team wants you to contribute your ideas. If you are nervous, first write out in point form what you want to say. This doesn't mean you shouldn't get better at grammar, but less than perfect grammar should never stop you from speaking. In some languages, native-speakers will stop non-native speakers in mid-sentence, if they make a grammar mistake. Not so in English. It is rare that a Canadian will stop and correct you. Keep your words and sentences simple. Be concise. Be organized. Don't let the perfect grammar myth stop you.

How to master English for work

There is no one way to develop strong English skills. Each person has a preferred learning style. Everyone has their own learning strategies and their own specific gaps to close. Table 4.1 is a set of eight foundational tips for building stronger English skills.

<p>1. Own it. Own it means take full responsibility and control of learning English. Take 100 percent ownership. You may need teachers, tutors and mentors to help you, but they can never be responsible. You have to “own” all of the learning and practicing. Also, your family may need to give you time and space to do it. They will need to support you in learning.</p>	<p>2. Be Specific. Focus on what you need to learn - reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, communication style, cultural intelligence, vocabulary. Be more specific - if it’s vocabulary, is it technical jargon, company abbreviations and jargon, idiomatic language, phrasal verbs etc. Then prioritize - what should come first. Set clear, specific and detailed goals that are achievable. Set short-term timelines, this week, the next three months etc. Put those into long-term timelines e.g. three years.</p>
<p>3. Be Deliberate. Choose active strategies, not passive attempts. Listening to the radio or watching television are not effective ways of learning. If those two strategies were really effective for becoming stronger in English, more newcomers would be fluent. Instead, use deliberate practice that is highly targeted to the language gaps you need to close. For example, instead of watching TV to target listening skills, put a DVD into your computer. Listen for a few seconds to the actors, then write out what you hear. Rewind. Listen again. Review what you wrote. Rewind till you hear it all. Then do the next section, and so on. Then put the closed captions on and check what you wrote against the script. Or go online and find the movie script. Most are freely downloadable. Then learn the new vocabulary, or new sentence structures. Ask native-speakers at work to explain things you can’t figure out alone. This is deliberate practice. It is tough. It’s lonely. It costs time. But it pays in the long run. Own it. Don’t wait for someone else to do it for you.</p>	<p>4. Stay Motivated. Get your reasons correct. Your motivations guide you like an internal compass. You have to find the right reasons to keep you motivated. You may have immigrated to Canada for your family’s future, but to master English, you will need personal motivations as well. A mix of internal and external motivators is a good idea. If you can “fall in love” with English, that would probably be enough. But some newcomers have more of a “love-hate” relationship with the language. English might simply be a means to an end goal, such as a job promotion to more interesting work. When you write out your goals, spend time identifying your motivations for wanting stronger English skills. Keep revisiting those reasons as you learn. Those reasons for learning will help you persevere when learning feels difficult.</p>
<p>5. Use Self-directed Study. Teachers play a key role in your learning. But as you move past the elementary levels of English, you need to take much more control of your learning goals and strategies. Once you are employed, you need to set aside time outside of work to be self-directed in your study. It might be an hour a week or ten hours or more. The best choice is to combine classroom study with self-directed learning.</p>	<p>6. Take Formal Training. Many choices for learning are available. Go online and find the schools, colleges and tutors and courses you need. Your company may offer in-house language, culture and integration training workshops. If not, suggest it, and use this desk-reference as a text book. Own it. Don’t wait for someone else to do it for you.</p>
<p>7. Connect with mentors You can connect with mentors and colleagues at work who enjoy helping newcomers. Such people are in every organization. Ask your supervisor to help you find and connect with them. Don’t wait for someone else to initiate this.</p>	<p>8. Don’t Plateau. A “plateau” is a wide flat piece of land. It is used to describe someone who stops growing, instead of “climbing” further up the mountain of learning to reach higher goals. Make strong English your mountain top goal. Make life-long learning your personal habit. Don’t give up.</p>

Table 4.1 Eight Tips for Building Strong English Skills

Section 12 Clear your pronunciation. Keep your accent.

What is clear pronunciation?

Clear speech is the right use of speed, pause and specific English sounds to make sure your message is understood the first time you speak. Without clear speech your words and ideas are not plain to listeners. Clear pronunciation does not mean you assume a Canadian accent. Many native-speakers emigrate from the US and UK every year. They never change their accents but they are able to speak clearly. Often, their vowel sounds (a-e-i-o-u) are a little different to Canadian vowels in English, but Canadians still understand them the first time they speak. This is a narrow generalization on a very complex topic, but when you are working and lack time, you need to know what can make a big difference in speech clarity in a short time.

Why clear pronunciation is important

Using clear speech limits misunderstandings of your message. People will understand you the first time you communicate a message. In fact, in oral communication, clear speech is more important than perfect grammar.



KEY POINT - To speak clearly monitor your speed, pause strategically, and limit your interjections, such as “um” and “ah”.

CULTURE BOX 4.2 Seeking clarification

If you don't understand something at work, ask for clarification from the speaker, or from a native-speaker. Avoid asking a colleague who speaks your language. They might also be wrong. Use mostly English at work; limit your first language to outside work.

You are expected to ask questions, especially if your English is not very strong. Supervisors and colleagues are happy to give clarification so that mistakes are avoided and time is not lost. The only dumb question is the one you keep asking. Write down in your notebook what you will likely forget. Never say “yes I understand” when you don't. Ask.

Seven Steps for Seeking Clarification - For clarification, use the following strategy:

1. Tell the person what you did understand, using his/her words.
2. Ask the person to explain again what you didn't understand. Keep your own English words simple.
3. Ask the person to use simple language.
4. Get the person to speak slowly and clearly, if you still don't understand.
5. Repeat it back to the person to check if you are correct.
6. Write it down if you need to.
7. Thank the person for showing patience while you were seeking clarification.

Section 12 Clear your pronunciation. Keep your accent.

How to speak clearly

There are many good books on pronunciation, but they can take a long time to learn. Usually, a newcomer can make big gains in a short time by working on the eight features of pronunciation listed in Table 4.2.

<p>1. Speed</p> <p>Slow down your speaking speed a little. If English is not your first language, you don't have to speak fast to be clear. No one expects you to speak fast. Only you. You probably sound less like a native speaker when you speak fast. If you are trying to cover up grammar mistakes by speaking fast, stop. Very often, increasing how much you think in English in the day will decrease translation in your head, and increase your speed more naturally. Thinking in English doesn't happen in a day - you have to choose to do it, even when it feels more like mental gymnastics than a natural choice. This is clear speech.</p>	<p>2. Pause</p> <p>Use a pause between your "thought groups" in a sentence. Thought groups are the way ideas, expressed as words, group together in chunks. For example, let's take the following quote by Peter Senghe, a pioneer in the learning organization, and put it into thought groups: [If change is] - [the essence of life] - [then] - [we must be willing] - [to surrender what we are] - [for what we can become.] The grouping of thoughts is natural, and there are a few other ways they could be grouped. The main point is to make sure you use better pause. This is clear speech.</p>
<p>3. Interjections</p> <p>Limit sounds like "um", "ah". Or words such as like, kinda etc. Or repeating words or making noises or even laughing. These are interjections. They make it hard to listen and follow you through the end of your message. Interjections occur if you are translating in your mind, or can't find the English word. You usually don't know you are doing them, unless someone tells you. Rather slow down, take a deep breath, say nothing for a moment. Try a different word or approach. Silence makes people listen more. This is clear speech.</p>	<p>4. Stop Consonants</p> <p>The letters P T K B D G at the end of words need to be harder and clearer in English. Some languages don't use them at all at the end, and that habit carries into speaking English. Your words sound chopped off at the end. This is often important for newcomers whose first languages are one of the following: Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and the South-east Asian languages such as Thai and Vietnamese etc. This is clear speech.</p>
<p>5. Multi-syllable Words</p> <p>Certain English words are longer than the words in some languages. They are made up of three or more syllables e.g. "en-gi-neer" or "a-count-ant." Some non-native speakers drop a middle syllable such as "gi" in "en-eer". Also, some newcomers might drop sounds such as the "t" in "accoun-an". This makes your speech unclear. Speak a little slower, and pronounce the full word - all the syllables. This is clear speech.</p>	<p>6. Sentence Stress</p> <p>The key words in any sentence are pronounced with more emphasis, a little louder. These are the words that carry the key meaning in the message. If you don't stress these words a little more, your speech sounds flat and the listener finds it hard to follow your ideas. It is similar to the telegram, before we had telephones. Only the words that carried meaning were written on the telegram. Sentence stress is the same practice - emphasize the words that carry the meaning. This is clear speech.</p>
<p>7. Enunciation</p> <p>Watch how sounds are formed in the mouth. Open your mouth wide enough to make certain sounds in English. In some cultures, showing teeth or an open mouth are impolite. Not so in English. You should enunciate your words like native-speakers.</p>	<p>8. Accent</p> <p>Keep your accent. It is part of your heritage. Focus on two or three pronunciation changes that make a big difference to your speech clarity.</p>

Table 4.2 Eight Pronunciation Tips

Section 12 Clear your pronunciation. Keep your accent.

CULTURE BOX 4.3 Seeking feedback

The purpose of feedback on your performance is for you to grow as a professional. Continuous learning is highly valued by employers. That includes both your technical and non-technical skills. Feedback is the comments and suggestions you receive from colleagues. It can happen formally. For example, you will probably have performance reviews at least once a year with your supervisor to plan your goals and develop ways to close any gaps. Feedback can also happen informally from coworkers and clients.

Canadians tend to suggest more than “tell” you what to change. They will also tend to affirm what you did well before suggesting changes to what is not working. Consequently, if you expect very direct feedback on what you are doing wrong, you will likely not get it. You will have to ask for it. One way of seeking direct feedback is to ask the following way: what should I stop doing, start doing and keep doing? These questions give an easy framework for people to give you constructive feedback, and to be direct without feeling uncomfortable. You could also use that same feedback model with trusted colleagues or mentors. If you are unsure what they mean, ask them to clarify more. But don't keep asking; write down what they say and put it into practice first. Timing is everything in feedback.



Unwritten Rule # 18 Use only English at work

If you work with colleagues with the same first language as yours, try to speak English together in the workplace. Outside the workplace is different. At work, speak English as much as possible.

When you speak another language, unfamiliar to your colleagues, you create a low trust environment. People want to be included in conversations. They don't want to feel on the outside. English is the one language that everyone can understand. Having everyone speak English, so that no one is excluded, is the most common request by employers in a multicultural organization. Employers don't expect perfect English; only that everyone tries to use English first.

Yet, it is easy to get tired in the day, if you are not working in your first language. Sometimes you do need to take a break from English. But when possible, use English first. It is good for your career.



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