

Influencing across cultures

Influencing others is a vital business skill, but how should you vary your approach to get the best results in different cultures?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to conclude
2. vital
3. an approach
4. to benefit
5. statistics
6. reasoning
7. persuasion
8. to influence

Definition

- a. to affect or change how someone thinks or behaves
- b. essential; most important
- c. the act of convincing someone to do something
- d. a way of thinking about or doing something
- e. to end a speech, presentation, meeting, etc.
- f. to be helped by something or someone
- g. thinking about something in a logical, sensible way
- h. a collection of numbers which show facts or measurements

Influencing across cultures

The ability to persuade other people is a vital business skill that will get you the support you need to go forward with your ideas. However, as Erin Meyer argues in *The Culture Map*, the art of persuasion is not universal. Different cultures can have different preferences for styles of persuasion. Choosing the right approach could make all the difference to the success of your presentation.

Let's imagine you sell chairs that can help people with back problems. Tomorrow, you've got a presentation where you're going to persuade the managers of a large company to buy your chairs for all their employees.

How would you do it?

Presentation A

You start with the practicalities and go straight to real-life examples. You present some case studies of people who developed back pain from sitting in uncomfortable chairs at work and were no longer able to come to work. You show how they and their companies benefited from buying your chair. Using those examples, you apply this to your audience and you tell them that because your chair helped your previous clients and saved their company money, it will help your audience too. You conclude that they should buy your chair.

Presentation B

You start with a theory: the theory that your chair can save the company money. You use research and statistics to support your argument, showing how employees' back problems cost the company money and explaining how your chair can solve those problems. You take listeners through the process of how you arrived at your conclusions, and you finish with the recommendation that they buy your chair.

So, which presentation style do you prefer?

If you chose Presentation A, then you prefer **inductive reasoning**. You go to real-life examples, rather than theory, to persuade people of your message.

If you chose Presentation B, then you prefer **deductive reasoning**. You start with the theory before the practical situation. You persuade people by taking them through how you arrive at your conclusions.

In *The Culture Map*, Meyer suggests that Anglo-Saxon cultures like the US, Canada, Australia and the UK prefer an inductive style of reasoning, while she connects deductive reasoning to countries like Italy, France, Spain and Russia. Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Sweden fall in the middle of the two. Meyer also explains that Asian cultures tend towards 'big picture' thinking, which requires a different approach entirely.

It is important to remember that your preferred influencing style might not be the same as your audience's preferred style. For best results, try to find out as much as possible about your audience and get to know their preferences. If possible, ask an 'insider' – someone who knows the culture and company you're dealing with well – for more information about how they do things. If you're not sure whether to choose an inductive or deductive approach, do both! Explain the theory and give an example at the same time. Finally, be ready to respond quickly to the audience's reaction and try a different way of doing things if what you planned doesn't seem to be working.

Source:

- Erin Meyer (2014) *The Culture Map*. USA: Public Affairs.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. There is one main way to be persuasive and it is the same for everyone.	True	False
2. Some people like to start presentations with real-life examples and avoid getting too theoretical.	True	False
3. Presentation B starts with a recommendation and leaves the theory until later.	True	False
4. If you use inductive reasoning, you start with the practical situation.	True	False
5. If you use deductive reasoning, you start with the theory.	True	False
6. The author of <i>The Culture Map</i> says that Anglo-Saxon cultures generally prefer to skip the theory and start with real-life examples.	True	False
7. If you choose a presentation style that is unfamiliar for your audience, it will probably have positive results.	True	False
8. Once you find an influencing style that works for you, you should stick to it.	True	False

Task 2

Write the word to fill the gaps.

1. The ability persuade others is a vital business skill.
2. However, the art persuasion is not universal.
3. Let's imagine you sell chairs can help people with back problems.
4. You present some case studies of people who developed back pain sitting in uncomfortable chairs work.
5. If you prefer deductive reasoning, you persuade people taking them through how you arrive your conclusions.
6. Be ready to try a different way of doing things if what you planned doesn't seem to working.

Discussion

Do you normally use an inductive or deductive style of persuasion? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your preferred style?

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. b
3. d
4. f
5. h
6. g
7. c
8. a

Task 1

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. True
7. False
8. False

Task 2

1. to
2. of
3. that / which
4. from / after / through; at
5. by; at
6. be