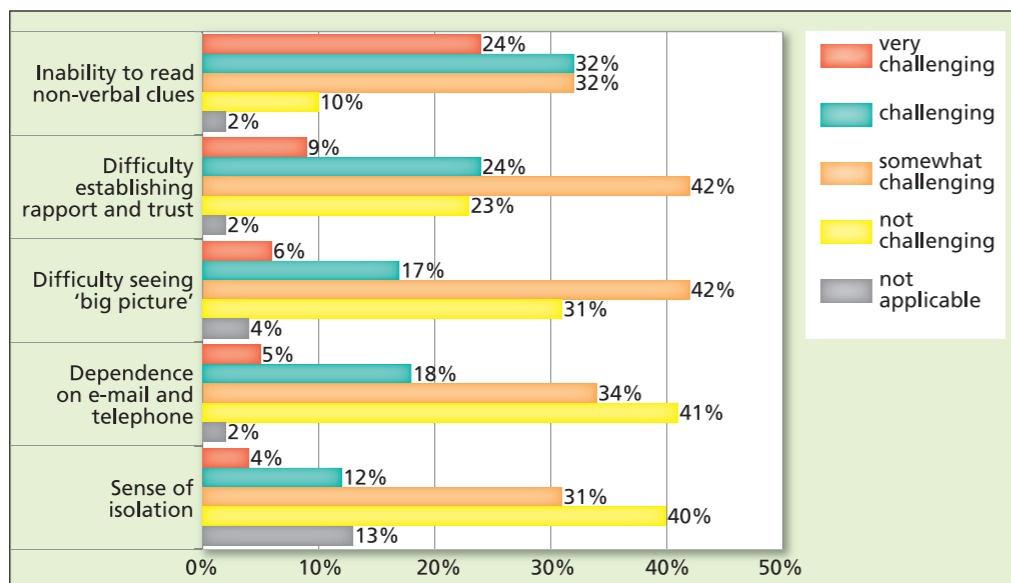


D Intercultural competence: How culture affects leaders and teams

- 1 What is your experience of working in a culturally diverse team? How, if at all, did you prepare for this diversity? How would the challenges have differed if the team had only been working virtually?
- 2 The chart below shows more results from the survey you saw on page 82, where respondents were asked to rank the challenges from most to least difficult. How far do the challenges you face personally when working virtually compare with these findings? Are there any challenges which are not mentioned in the survey which you feel are important? Discuss with a partner.



Taken from 2012 survey by RW3 Culture Wizard



- 3 Professor Geert Hofstede is a leading thinker and researcher into cross-cultural communication. He conducted one of the most comprehensive studies ever about how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. He is recognised internationally for having developed the first model of 'dimensions' of national culture, establishing a new way of measuring the effect of cultural factors on international economics, communication and co-operation. One of the five cultural dimensions he modelled was Individualism versus Collectivism. As he defined it:

The degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of 'I' or 'we'. In Individualist societies, people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies, people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty.

The four cultures described below and on page 85 illustrate some of the key attributes of this cultural dimension. Can you think of four countries which could match the four descriptions? Discuss your opinions with your partner.

Culture A: This is amongst the most individualistic. Children are socialised from an early age, and are taught to think for themselves, to find out what their unique purpose in life is and how they can contribute to society, whilst benefiting themselves. The route to happiness is through personal fulfilment. As the affluence of this country has increased over the last 30 years, there has been a rise in consumerism, a fall in the observance of traditional religious values and a strengthening of the 'me' culture.

Culture B: Within Europe, this culture is considered as highly collectivist, due to its frequently expressed and strong sense of national identity. However, compared with other areas of the world, it is quite individualist. Teamwork is considered entirely natural, although management of team members is individual, and explicit recognition of individual contributions is expected. Employees tend to work well with no need for strong external motivation.

Culture C: This culture scores high on the individualistic index. This means that people favour individual and private opinions, taking care of themselves and immediate family rather than belonging to a group. Work relationships are contract-based, the focus is on the task, and a high acceptance of individual autonomy is normal. Communication is mostly direct, and everyone is allowed to voice opinions, especially if they do not agree.

Culture D: This is a highly collectivist culture, where people act in the interests of the group and not necessarily of themselves. Decisions affecting recruitment are often closely linked to family, community and personal contacts. Employee commitment to the organisation is often high, and relationships with colleagues are co-operative, supportive and team-oriented. Personal relationships can be as important as the task and company, and it is regarded as important not to 'lose face'.

adapted from <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

- 4 How can a team leader with members from the four different cultures described in Exercise 3 ensure that the virtual team can work to its full potential?

Case study: EasyFix

Background EasyFix is an automotive company specialising in spare parts for the car-leasing industry. It is based in the UK, but has partnerships with manufacturers in France and distributors in Spain and Portugal. The founding company was American. The US firm no longer has much influence over business decisions, but the management style is dominant and top-down, with the focus on short-term results. Like all its competitors, EasyFix is suffering from falling sales due to the continuing recession in Europe and it is under pressure from its shareholders to improve performance.

Situation The Sales Manager, Jayne, has been instructed by the Head of European Sales to set up a new initiative designed to increase the sales contracts secured by her team each month. Jayne knows that most of her team are feeling extremely demotivated. They are very worried by the lack of demand in their countries due to the economic situation. However, despite the current situation, Jayne is determined to maintain a positive mood and engage her team fully in the new initiative.

- Tasks** 1 45 Listen to an extract from the conference call, which Jayne organises to launch the initiative. Make notes on the behaviour displayed during the call.

- 2 Discuss these questions.

- a What cultural issues are highlighted by Jayne's call?
- b What should Jayne's priorities be after this meeting?
- c What action would you take in her position?