

## A Cultures and culture

**Culture** is the 'way we do things round here'. 'Here' might mean a country, an area, a social class or an organization such as a company or school. It includes **values** – things that people think are important – and **beliefs** – things that people believe in.

For example, you talk about:

<b>business</b>	the way that companies in general behave, the way business is done, etc. in a particular place
<b>company or corporate</b>	the way a particular company works and the things that its employees believe are important
<b>long-hours</b>	where people are expected to work a long time each day
<b>macho</b>	the values typically associated with men – strength, etc.
<b>sales</b>	when selling is seen as the most important thing in an organization, rather than other activities
<b>learning</b>	when learning and innovation are seen as important

See also **enterprise culture**, Unit 11.

But you must be careful of **stereotypes** – fixed ideas that may not be true.

Look at A opposite. Which word combination with 'culture' relates to each of the following?

- 1 The men really dominate in this company – they don't make life easy for women at all. All they talk about is football.
- 2 They say that if you go home at 5.30, you can't be doing your job properly. But I'm going anyway.
- 3 We're all encouraged to go on courses and to keep up our specialist knowledge.
- 4 There was a time when managers could only wear white shirts in this particular company – things are a bit less formal now. (2 expressions)
- 5 In this country, it's easy to do business and there's very little bureaucracy.
- 6 All the chief executives in the company's history have had a background in selling.

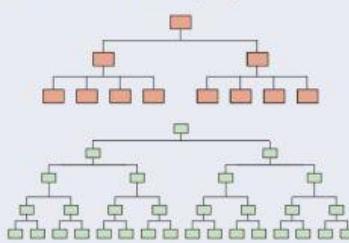
## Power and distance

A company's culture depends to a large extent on the country it is based in. Geert Hofstede is a world-famous expert on **cultural differences**. **Power-distance** is one of the important **cultural dimensions** that he identified.

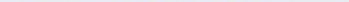
Sweden is a **low power-distance culture**. Managers are **accessible** and **approachable** (see Unit 44) and there is a tradition of employees being involved in **decision-making** as part of a **team of equals** – everyone's opinion is treated equally.

France is a **high power-distance culture**. Managers are usually more **distant** and **remote**. Employees may feel quite distant from their managers and show a lot of **deference** – respect – to them, following decisions but not participating in them.

Now have a look at these organograms:



This Swedish company is not very **hierarchical**, with only three **management layers** – different levels.



French companies are on the whole more **hierarchical** than Swedish ones, with more **management layers**.

Deference and distance may be shown in language. Some languages have many **forms of address** that you use to indicate how **familiar** you are with someone. In English, whether first names or surnames are used can show distance.

See Unit 7 for more on hierarchy and **delayering** – reducing the number of management layers – and Unit 44 for more on management styles.

Read this information about two very different companies and answer the questions.

The Associated Box Company (ABC) and the Superior Box Company (SBC) both make cardboard boxes. At ABC, there are three different levels of management between the CEO and the people who actually make the boxes. At SBC, there is only one level.

Managers at ABC are very distant. They rarely leave their offices, they have their own executive restaurant and the employees hardly ever see them. Employees are never consulted in decision-making. At SBC, managers share the same canteen with employees. Managers have long meetings with employees before taking important decisions.

Managers and the CEO of SBC have an open-door policy where employees can come to see them about any complaint they might have. At ABC, employees must sort out problems with the manager immediately above them.

At ABC, employees call their managers 'Sir'. At SBC, everyone uses first names.

- 1 Which company is ... ?
  - a more hierarchical
  - b more informal in the way people talk to each other
- 2 In which company are managers ... ?
  - a more approachable
  - b more remote
- 3 In which company are employees ... ?
  - a more deferential
  - b on more equal terms with their bosses