

# Cultural Values and Georgian Society in Business Communication

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## Abstract

Globalization is a process that promotes international business as it makes world smaller. Successful international business needs communication to establish profitable partnership, but the main thing that can hinder successful communication is culture. Peculiarities of cultural values are the main things that should be foreseen. A lot of researches have been conducted on cultural values but diversity of our world requires more specificity. The article gives some important dimensions of cultural values and analyzes characteristics of Georgian society in comparison with some other cultures.

**Keywords:** business, communication, culture, Georgia, value

## Introduction

Business, under the influence of globalization which implies collaboration of people with different cultural background, tends to become boundless. That requires successful communication across cultures to achieve profitable business enlargement. However, fruitful communication across different cultures seems more and more challenging, as one set of rules or behavior is acceptable or common for one part of the world and unusual or vague for others. Considerable research has been conducted to reveal cultural differences. The most distinguished works are of Geert Hofstede, a Dutch psychologist and Fons Trompenaars. Their works made people to think about cultural diversity and gives patterns to have smooth and fruitful communication with the implication of cultural peculiarities. However, much more are left to be said and examined as the world we live in is very diverse, colorful and interesting. It would be interesting to review a few points and bring some examples from Georgian culture. A few comparisons with the western or European cultures will make vivid multifacetedness and complexity of global business communication.

Defining the essence of culture is very interesting. If you ask a Georgian fellow what is culture, they will definitely bring a few example of their everyday life and will start talking about the customs Georgian are distinguished by. Culture is truly believed to be a set of rules, customs and habits acceptable for a certain group of people. "*Our culture is a*

*learned set of assumptions that shape our perceptions of the world, and of appropriate values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours.*" (Locker K., 2007) That rules are mainly taught and passed from one generation to another. That is the driving force that unites the people and makes them so close that they have a feeling of family. Culture also defines the vision of the world. For example: active verbal communication sometimes even irresistibly loud is characteristic for Georgian people so its common opinion that silence is a sign of disapproval, embarrassment or boredom. Therefore, when Georgians get to a country where silence is a sign of hard-work or respect they get confused and need further explanation to understand the situation. However, the available research is targeted to clarify our misconception about other cultures.

The first thing that should be taken into consideration while discussing culture is low-content and high-content cultures. Low-content culture "spells out more of the information explicitly in the message". (Hooker, 2008) Low-content cultures are found in the West including the USA, Canadian, German, and some other European countries. Low-context culture is distinguished by directions everywhere, for example you can find any sign you need in the streets or in any organization of those country, so that you don't need any additional personal assistance. The other characteristic feature is thorough regulations which are widely used and well establish practice in process of doing business and developing

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corporate culture. Contracts are usually long and detailed, each point carefully elaborated and all or nearly all possible outcomes and feedbacks envisioned. People from the low-context culture tend less to rely on the personal relationship and are inclined to prefer written documents that give them feeling of security, order and clarity. (Hooker, 2008)

High-context culture is more focused on the context of a message; it needs more background information to be understood the message. Latin, Japanese and Arab cultures are high context cultures. Georgian culture also tend to be more high-context one. You can see a lot of signs in the street of Georgia but some of them are vague and unhelpful. So the personal assistance comes on the surface. Communication abilities of Georgian people are really exciting so helping is perceived as pleasant duty. Georgian people do have corporate regulation but a few of employees read them thoroughly, we like personal explanations of the regulations and letter of excuses are rarely written, due to that personal excuses are widely established in practice. As for contracts, Georgian People also like clarity and thoroughness but not everything is black and white, a little place for interpretation is sometimes left. However, typical traits of high-context and low context cultures can be seen in composition in Georgian culture as there is no clear line between them.

Another significant difference between cultures is **particularism or relationship-based** and universalism or **rule-based** cultures. Each of them is focused on interpretation relationship but from different angle. Representatives of rule-based culture are the USA, German and some European countries. While relationship-based is the culture which tends to value relationship more than rule-obedience. Georgian culture is inclined to be more relationship-based. It is unacceptable to deny a friend's or a family member's involvement in business despite the fact that it can be in opposition of some rules. On the contrary rule-based society "may invest in family members or friends, but this is not the general pattern and may cause more strain that the relationships can bear" (Hooker, 2008). So having international business requires some knowledge about rule obedience character of the society.

Another key point in comparing cultures - is **time management**. Time management viewpoint divides the world roughly into two parts. We have **sequential** and **synchronic** cultures. Representatives of sequential cultures like North American, English, German and others tend to focus on agenda subjects one by one. They believe that individual can influence on future but there a lot of possibilities and right decision making is vital. So they tend to be more short-term planning oriented in business. (Goman, 2011)

However, representatives of synchronic cultures, South Europe, South America, Asia and Georgia as well, view time as a sort of span with past, present and future. More precisely, *"time is flexible and various activities can take place at the same time. People from synchronic cultures have a goal in mind but there is no 1 'critical path' to achieve this goal. There are numerous ways to reach the goal and the person can switch between activities as needed."* (Dingemans, 2011) This viewpoint influences their ability to meet deadlines, Georgian people usually like to fulfill almost everything at a very last moment, is also influences their strategic thinking and business development. They usually have long-term plans and feel uncomfortable with short term planning. The modern business development especially international one seems to focus on short-term planning more as it is very hard to find a solid root or solid demand for one type

business in vast diversity. And finally their time management skills also influences on punctuality, Georgian people try usually to be punctual but 10 or 15 minute delay is normal.

The biggest challenge for Georgian people is being reserved. We, Georgian are very emotional, and that's cannot be hidden sometimes. However, doing international business made us wonder about the smiling face of our partner, if he was really happy or if he was good at controlling inner voice. **Neutral** culture cares much about the display of emotion, showing emotions are least acceptable in Japan, U.K., Norway but representatives of emotional culture: Georgian, USA, Italy, France like to express themselves via emotions. (Goman, 2011) Due to that, people of neutral culture should not be seen as cold or unfeeling ones, they do just what they have been taught during centuries.

Another trait that donates clear cultural differences is **individualism and collectivism** in cultures. Individualism values each person's abilities, wit and achievement. Collectivism is characterized by tight interpersonal connections and their security through the group. It also grants them caring and supportiveness in exchange for loyalty. (Khairullah, D.; Khairullah, Z., 2013) It is really hard to distinguish clearly where Georgian society is, as they appreciate individualism, some individuals get preferential treatment as well. But society has tight bonds to collectivism, as Georgian people are very close to their kinship and life without belonging to a small group does not have much sense. It should be mentioned that individualist cultures believe in existence of the universal values which should be shared. (Differences in Cultures) Some Georgians also believe that their individual way of life is the superior one. Majority of them share collectivism's belief that different groups can have different values. That is highly acceptable for Georgian multinational society.

One more differentiating unit of cultures is **uncertainty avoidance**. The cultures inclined towards high uncertainty avoidance feel uncomfortable with risk and uncertainty - using many rituals routines and bureaucracy (Japan, Argentina, France). But low uncertainty avoidance is a practice when risk is acceptable and more informality and flexibility is observed in business communication. (Rugman, A. M.; Collinson, S., 2009) Georgian tends to be representative of high uncertainty avoidance but they made attempts to simplify bureaucracy as much as possible but still they are less risk takers and prefer clarity and security in business.

Point that should be carried in mind while doing business across cultures is to understand if the culture is **specific or diffuse**, these are the dimensions which measure "how far people get involved with other's life space." (Multi-cultural Impact) In a specific culture, work relationships are separated from private ones. It is a good practice as it enables employer to work with less vulnerability in mind, they find termination of cooperation less painful. People exercising specific cultural attitude towards the business relationship tend to be more goal-oriented and more determined to achieve personal success, that's why high mobility of workforce is characteristic for specific cultures. Australia and the Netherlands have the most specific culture. Most East Asian cultures are highly diffuse cultures. So is the Georgian one. People's relationship is not just limited to the office, but it is widely extended outside as well. Georgian people are highly diffuse in relationships. People working together often become very close friends, sometimes even relatives or spouses. Characteristic patterns for diffuse cultures are less mobility of workforce and more orientation on company success. They also appreciate privacy but complete or almost

complete “separation of private life leads to alienation and superficiality.” (Multicultural Impact)

The diversity of Georgian society and its aspiration towards equal human possibilities complicates its attribution to achievement-oriented or to **ascription**-oriented cultures. Achievement oriented is culture when “people are judged on what they have accomplished and on their record”. (Multicultural Impact) A lot of people’s merit is long remembered in Georgian societies and is highly appreciated. But still ascription orientation is not unusual in Georgia. Ascription means that “status is attributed to you by things like birth, kinship, gender, age, interpersonal connections, or educational record.” (Multicultural Impact) It is not a bad practice but its overuse can cause unwilling consequences not only in business but can also emerge some human right problems.

**Masculinity and Femininity** are the cultural dimensions which have no connection with the role of men or women in society. Masculinity is a culture which values more traditional masculine attributes, for example success, money, assertiveness, material things, competition and so on. Femininity values feminine thing like modesty, caring, supportiveness, gentleness and so on. Georgian culture is strongly masculine having very few traits of femininity. Georgian people love competition, success and money but on the other hand they are people who care about others much and are more or less supportive.

The most interesting cultural value especially in doing business is power distance. Power distance refers to equality versus authority. High power cultures treat elders and superiors with deference and respect, but low context culture is more egalitarian, that’s means equal treatments is more advanced. Georgian society tends to have high power distance, one can always feel deep respect and reverence towards superiors and elders. However Georgians are very sociable and workplace is not the dead-end place for relationship, so you can see more informal attributions towards the elders and superiors as well.

Globalization, the process that discloses complexity of human societies and the need of other people, opens opportunities of new prospects, education, development and business enlargement. It grants people chance to expand viewpoint, to recognize differences and be sympathetic with diversity. Knowledge of cultural values of target society reduces cultural shock, simplifies communication and guarantees success. Communication across cultures is difficult itself, but business communication is more difficult as it is aimed to achieve goals. International businesses cannot be successful if they are not adjusted to the existed reality, business communication will not be profitable if it does not consider specific cultural values of a partner.

Doing business in Georgia, as in many other countries as well, cannot be easy to some context. People here have their own pace of life which can be familiar or unfamiliar, their time management, expressiveness and rule-obedience skill can be perplexing, but their sociable, comprehensible and caring nature is really fruitful soil for prospective, successful and profitable business communication, which is a great foundation for prospective and profitable partnership.

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