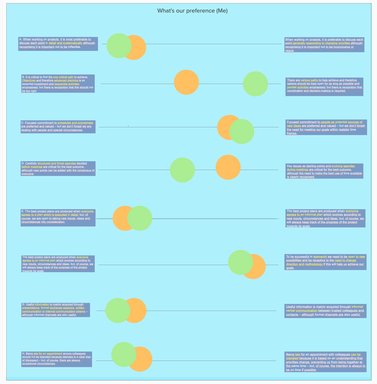


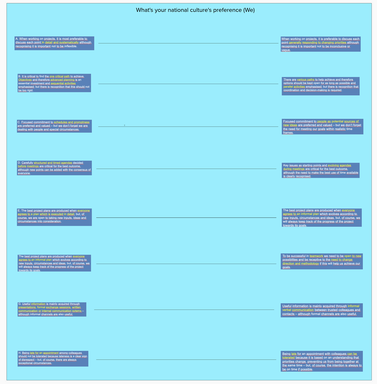


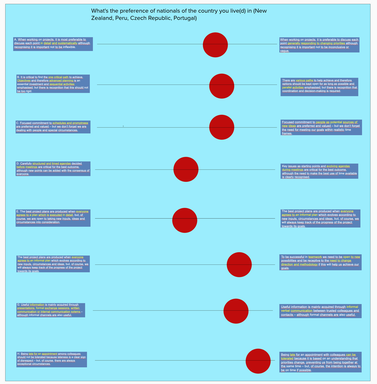

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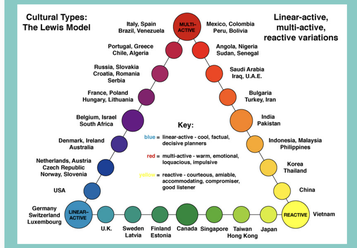
## Richard Donald Lewis




Richard Donald Lewis (1930-)
is a British polyglot, cross-cultural communication consultant, and author. He developed the Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication
The core of the model classifies cultural norms into Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Re-Active, or some combination.

- Linear-active: **follow tasks sequentially**. Drivers are facts, tasks and efficiency. Communication follows clear structures - „question – answer".
  -> Examples: Northern Europe, North America and related countries.
- Multi-active: **pursue multiple goals simultaneously**. People, relationships and flexibility are the driver. Communication is dialogue-focused and simultaneous. Body language is important. Information is passed on in personal and informal networks.
  -> Examples: Southern European, Latin America, Africa, Middle-East
- Re-active: follow harmonising, solidarity-based strategies. These cultures have a **cyclical understanding for time** following the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. All events, challenges, opportunities will come back eventually. In business, people take a lot of time to make sustainable decisions for the future.

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## Richard Donald Lewis

| | Linear-active | | Highly re-active |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Germans, Swiss | 1. | Japanese* |
| 2. | US-Americans | 2. | Chinese |
| 3. | Scandinavian, Austrian | 3. | Taiwanese |
| 4. | Brits, Canadian, NZ | 4. | Singapore, Hongkong Chinese* |
| 5. | Australians, South Africans | 5. | Finns* |
| 6. | Dutch, Belgian | 6. | Korean |
| 7. | US subcultures | 7. | Turkish+ |
| 8. | French, Belgian | 8. | Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laos |
| 9. | Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian | 9. | Malaysian, Indonesian |
| 10. | North-Italian | 10. | Pacific Islands+ |
| 11. | Chilean | 11. | Swedish* |
| 12. | Russians, other Slavish | 12. | Brits* |
| 13. | Portuguese | | occasionally re-active |
| 14. | Polynesian | | |
| 15. | Spanish, South-Italian | | |
| 16. | Indian, Pakistani | | |
| 17. | Latin-American, Arabs, Africans | | Multi-active |

* linear-active tendencies
\+ multi-active tendencies

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## Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

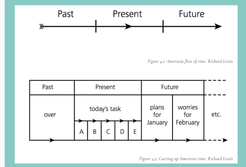


*Figure 4.1 American flow of time. Richard Lewis*

*Figure 4.2 Carving up American time. Richard Lewis*

The American concept of time **is the most expensive**, as anyone who has had to deal with American doctors, dentists or lawyers will tell you.

For an American, time is truly money. In a **profit-oriented society, time is a precious, even scarce, commodity**. It flows fast, like a mountain river in the spring, and if you want to benefit from its passing, you have to move fast with it. **Americans are people of action; they cannot bear to be idle. The past is over, but the present you can seize, parcel and package and make it work for you in the immediate future.**

The Americans are not the only ones who sanctify timekeeping, for it is practically a religion in Switzerland and Germany, too. These countries, along with Britain, the Anglo-Saxon world in general, the Netherlands, Austria and Scandinavia, have a linear vision of time and action. **They suspect, like the Americans, that time is passing (being wasted) without decisions being made or actions being performed**.

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## Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

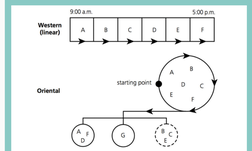


*Figure 4.6: Western action chains/team reflection. Richard Lewis*

Western action versus Asian reflection. The American, German and Swiss go home satisfied that all tasks have been completed. The French or Italian might leave some "mopping up" for the following day. The Thai attitude toward time can be seen as a **pool one could gradually walk around**. This metaphor applies to most Asians, who, instead of tackling problems immediately in sequential fashion, **circle around them for a few days or weeks before committing themselves. After a suitable period of reflection, tasks A, D and F may indeed seem worthy of pursuing. Tasks B, C and E may be quietly dropped. Contemplation of the whole scene has indicated, however, that task G, perhaps not even envisaged at all earlier on, might be the most significant of all.**

In some Eastern cultures, time is viewed neither as linear nor event-relationship related, but as **cyclic**. Each day the sun rises and sets, the seasons follow one another, the heavenly bodies revolve around us, people grow old and die, but their children reconstitute the process. We know this cycle has gone on for 100,000 years and more. Cyclical time is not a scarce commodity. **There seems always to be an unlimited supply of it just around the next bend. As they say in the East, when God made time, he made plenty of it.**

**In a Buddhist culture (e.g., Thailand, Tibet), not only time but also life itself goes around in a circle. Whatever we plan, however we organize our particular world, generation follows generation; governments and rulers will succeed each other; crops will be harvested; monsoons, earthquakes and other catastrophes will recur; taxes will be paid; the sun and moon will rise and set; stocks and shares will rise and fall. Even the Americans will not change such events, certainly not by rushing things.**

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## Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

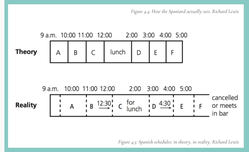


*Figure 4.4 How the Spaniard actually was. Richard Lewis*

*Figure 4.5 Spanish schedules: in theory, in reality. Richard Lewis*

Southern Europeans are multi-active, rather than linear-active. **The more things they can do at the same time, the happier and the more fulfilled they feel.** They organize their time (and lives) in an entirely different way from Americans, Germans and the Swiss. Multi-active peoples are not very interested in schedules or punctuality. **They consider the present reality to be more important than appointments. In their ordering of things, priority is given to the relative thrill or significance of each meeting.** Spaniards, Italians and Arabs will **ignore the passing of time if it means that conversations will be left unfinished. For them, completing a human transaction is the best way they can invest their time.**
**The business we have to do and our close relations are so important that it is irrelevant at what time we meet. The meeting is what counts.**
**In countries inhabited by linear-active people, time is clock- and calendar- related,** segmented in an abstract manner for our convenience, measurement, and disposal.
**In multi-active cultures like the Arab and Latin spheres, time is event- or personality-related, a subjective commodity which can be manipulated, molded, stretched, or dispensed with, irrespective of what the clock says.**

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## Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

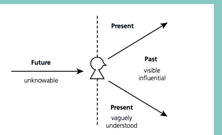


*Figure 4.7 Malagasy concept of time. Richard Lewis*

The Malagasy consider **the future unknowable. It is behind their head where they do not have eyes. Buses in Madagascar leave, not according to a predetermined timetable, but when the bus is full.**

**The situation triggers the event.** Not only does this make economic sense, but it is also the time that most passengers have chosen to leave. **Consequently, in Madagascar stocks are not replenished until shelves are empty, filling stations order gas only when they run dry, and hordes of would-be passengers at the airport find that, in spite of their tickets, in reality everybody is wait-listed. The actual assignation of seats takes place between the opening of the check-in desk and the (eventual) departure of the plane.**

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## Edward Hall, Gert Hofsteede, Fons Trompenaars, Erin Meyer: perception of time in different cultures

Edward Hall (1914-2009)
is recognized as the founding father of intercultural communications. In his most popular book, The Silent Language, Hall explains his concept of chronemics (how our relationship to time affects communication) and sites many cross-cultural comparisons, among others in planning of buildings and cities.

- **Monochromic time:** In monochromic cultures things happen sequentially and great attention is paid to planning and scheduling.
  -> Examples: Australia, US, UK, Germany
- **Polychromic time:** In polychromic cultures many things happen at once and there is less emphasis on „getting things done" linearly.
  -> Examples: Italy's „L'arte di arrangiarsi" (the art of getting by, the art of making do, i.e. talent of survival mixed with staying grounded and authentic), Spain, Brazil, Argentina.

Geert Hofstede (1928-2020)
is a Dutch social psychologist who focuses his work on the study of cultures across nations and developed the concepts of **short-term** (fast results) and **long-term** orientation (over generations).

Fons Trompenaars (1952-)
is a Dutch organizational theorist, management consultant, and author in the field of cross-cultural communication.
He is known for the development of his model of national culture differences, which has seven cultural dimensions:

**Sequential / linear**
Time is linear and can be measured. Schedules, timeliness are more important than relationships.

**Synchronic / cyclical**
Time is circular and consists of many events happening simultaneously. Time „breaths". It is more important to dedicate time to people and unexpected events than it is to be punctual.

Erin Meyer (1971-)
Author of "The Culture Map" looks at time as **linear vs flexible**. See image to the right.

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