

Surfacing expectations | 1.2

When they are working in an international environment, mindful managers do not assume that their teams and other stakeholders understand their expectations.

A U.S. manager, sitting in her office in Boston, emails an Italian colleague working in Milan. She writes: "I'd like that report by next Monday". The U.S. manager intends this as an urgent request for a finished report. But the Italian may understand this as a wish, not a request. He may not feel the urgency of the deadline at all.

When the report does not arrive, the U.S. manager's prejudice about 'unpunctual Italians' is confirmed. She phones her Italian colleague and expresses her frustration. This confirms the Italian's prejudice about 'pushy Americans'.

Mindful management of an international team means that you need to surface your expectations and expose your intentions much more transparently. If you do this, your performance and results will compare very well with those of your domestic team.

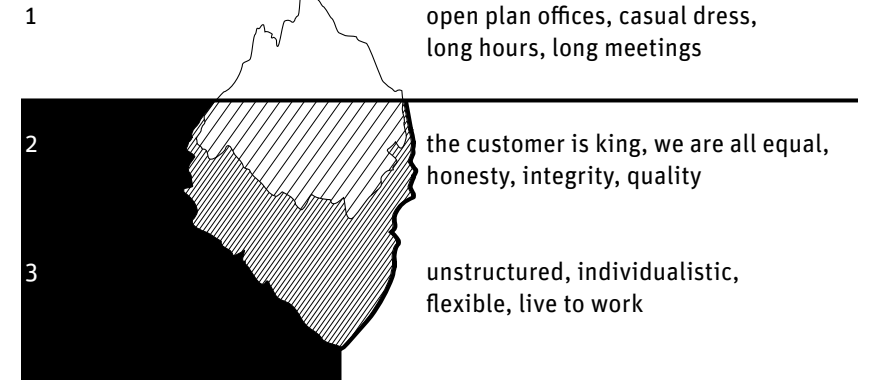
Cultural icebergs

Before managers communicate their specific expectations, it is important for them to reflect on the differences between their own organisational culture and the organisational cultures which their team members may be used to.

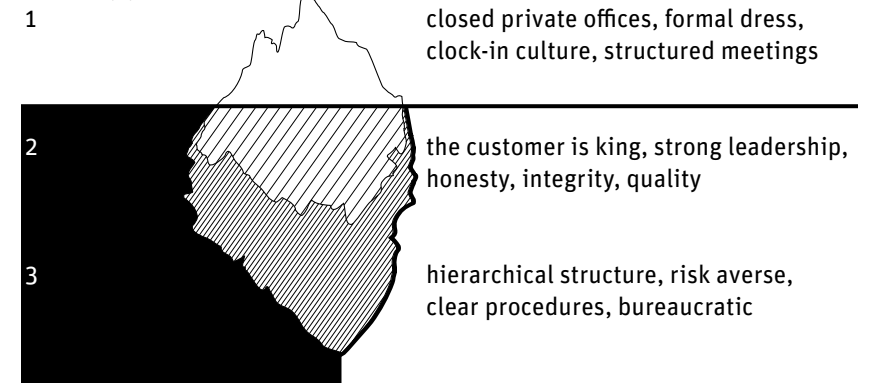
Many writers¹ have described organisational culture as an iceberg. Edgar Schein² breaks culture down into three parts:

- 1 Above the surface: features of the culture which you can see.
What do you notice first about the company's culture? What do you see when you first enter the building? What processes are in place?
- 2 Just below the surface: official norms and codes of conduct
What does the company communicate about its culture? What are its stated values? How does it expect its people to behave? What is its strategy, its philosophy? What are its goals?
- 3 Deep below the surface: hidden assumptions and truths
What have you discovered about the culture after you have worked there for some time? What are the unspoken beliefs?

Company x culture



Company y culture



Understanding your own cultures | 1.3

In today's world, managers increasingly manage diverse groups. This diversity is created by culture – of various kinds. The variety of cultures may be complex to handle, but when managers use its potential in the right way, it is also a source of creativity and improved performance.

Culture influences the behaviour of groups of people – a group of Brazilians, a group of accountants or a group belonging to the same extended family. A culture gives group members guidance as to how to think and feel, how to act, and how to evaluate the actions of others: it is an orientation system for behaviour in the group. A culture also gives to its members a feeling of belonging and identity. It is the glue that holds the group together.

International managers firstly need to understand the various cultures of which they are members and how these cultures influence their behaviour.