

# World class interaction



A guide to good working  
relationships across cultures

# Purpose of the Guide

This guide is a tool to help create good working relationships across cultures. It has been written for the OSH organisations within the Danish abattoir and meat industry.

In the Danish labour market the abattoir and meat industry is characterised by a working force consisting of many different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. This provides a breeding ground for a lot of potential, on the other hand the cultural differences can also cause challenges in the daily working relationships.

Kødindustriens Arbejdsmiljøudvalg (KAU) has taken the industry's call about "doing something" that can contribute to the understanding of the challenges that may occur at the different workplaces. The challenges addressed in this guide are not about language barriers, but about what lies underneath the language – or more precisely our cultural differences.

It has been a long journey to find out in what way we could contribute. Conditions that depend on something as complex as the difference between nationalities, the diversity among people from within the different nationalities, the different corporate cultures, etc. How could we develop something that could cover such a wide field, and where the goal is to contribute to:

**Fewer misunderstandings between managers and employees and among different employee groups**

**Better work health and work safety due to clearer communication**

**A good working environment in a productive environment**



The consultancy People & Performance helped us through this guide, which is divided into two parts. The first part is about culture in a broad sense and can be used as a help to understand what culture is all about, and how to better understand people with a different cultural background than your own.

The other part is more specifically about the differences between Danish, German and Polish cultures. For that part, we are grateful for the help we got from six representatives from within the industry. They spent an entire day with People & Performance sharing concrete experiences and assessments about cultural differences from everyday life.



We believe that you can use this guide as input and a possibility for reaching a better understanding of each other. All in order to avoid misunderstandings, to tackle conflicts, if they occur, or even when you have to explain to colleagues which working behaviour is expected and also which working behaviour is not expected.

Maybe the guide can also be distributed to new employees, to an entire department, or however it fits into your organisation. Therefore the guide has been translated into Polish, German and English, and it can be downloaded at [www.savportalen.dk](http://www.savportalen.dk) under Tools.

Hope you get on well with your work!

Køindustriens Arbejdsmiljøudvalg

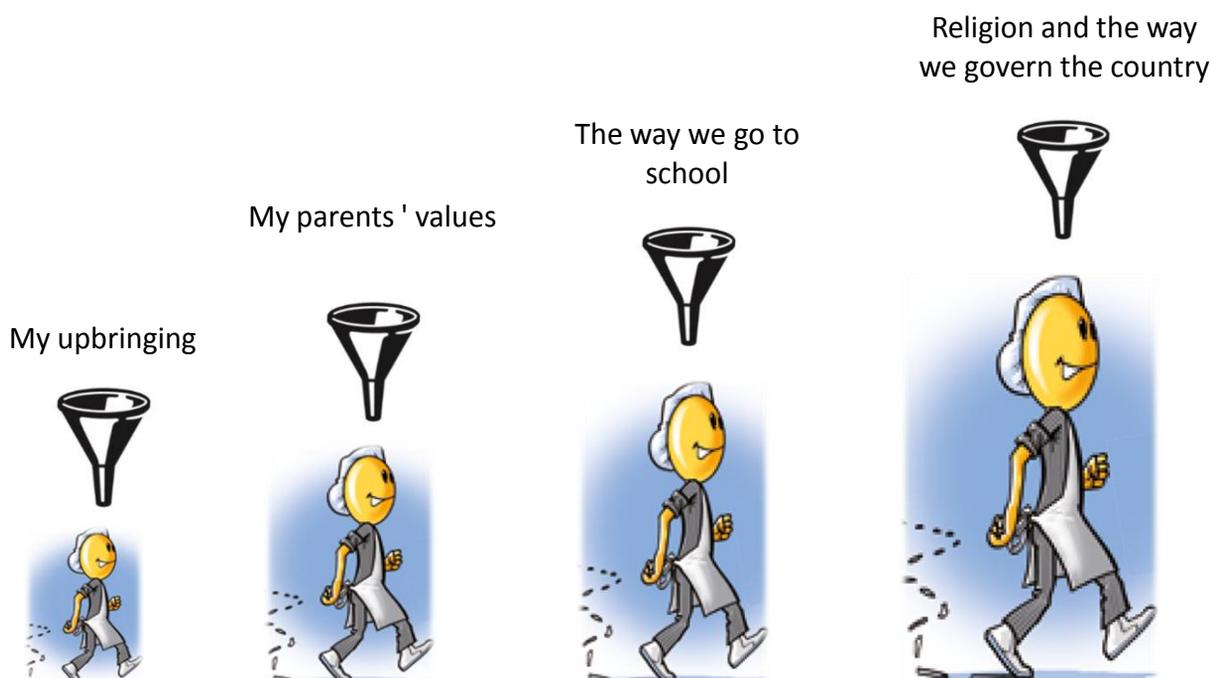
# What is culture?

First and foremost, it is important to understand what culture is – and how the individual cultural background arises.

Culture is a unifying term for all of the things that characterises a society: our traditions, our eating habits, our attire, the way we raise our children, the way our school system teaches our children, the way we govern the country, our religion, our way to celebrate and mourn. In short, culture is the sum of all the values that a society is based on.

This means that all humans build things up based on something they believe in deep down and rarely question. This is for instance the concept of justice, gender equality, children's right to be heard, democracy and religion.

Below you will find some examples of how culture occurs in the individual – on the basis of the values that exist in the society we grow up in.



# Cultural differences

There are major and minor cultural differences depending on where you come from, how you grew up, and what you believe in. Therefore, culture creates different points of view, even if we look at the same issue, and it naturally has a major influence on the way we cooperate.



"Wow, what a cute dog! I want to pat it."



"Hmmm, a meal."

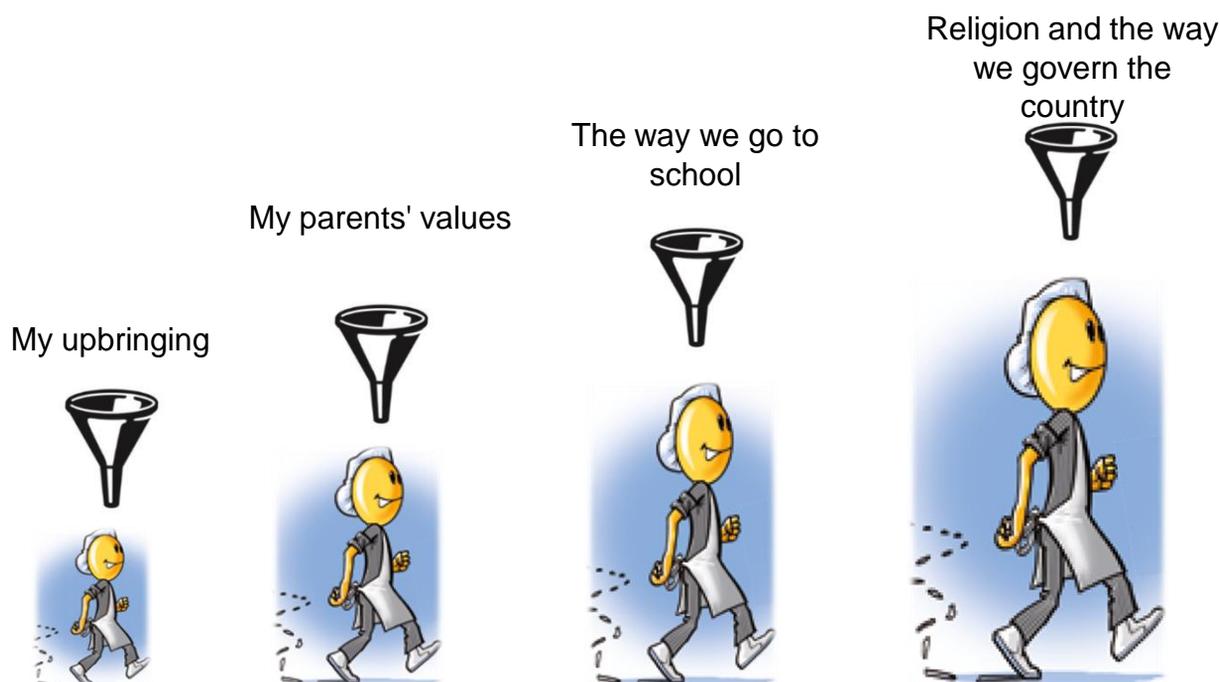


Cultural difference challenges us, especially when we perceive things differently, but at the same time it offers a huge opportunity to obtain multiple views on the same matter. Diversity makes us strong if we exert ourselves in order to accept that others do not think in the same way we do.

# Danish culture

Before we turn our gaze towards the differences which have been found by exchange of experiences from Danish jobs within the abattoir industry, you here have a short description of some Danish cultural characteristics as a basis for understanding the differences:

In Denmark:



... let the children feel their way. This means that Danes expect initiative from each other.

.... children and adults are equals and children are allowed to contradict adults. This means that Danes expect others to express their point of view - also towards your manager - in a constructive way.

..in school you practice constructive discussion, express your opinion and accept others' point of view. This means that the Danes expect to be heard and they respect the will of the majority.

... great effort is put into community and it is expected that you comply with common rules. Therefore Danes expects that the common rules that are agreed upon are respected.

# At a Danish workplace there is for example ...

... no uniforms which show who the leaders are.  
But it is still them who decide.

Jerzy Okipny, NNF Consultant  
Polish worker, NNF

... an informal tone and the employees are being involved. This meant that I had to learn to say my point of view out loud.

Grazyna Ryba,  
Polish worker, DanePork a/s

... Strong focus on employee safety. Security weighs just as much as getting our tasks solved quickly.

Mario Cieslak,  
Polish worker, Tulip



# Cross-cultural differences



*When I experience a different behavior than the one I expect, it is often a sign of cultural differences at play.*

On the next pages you will see selected examples of cultural differences, which are important to understand when cooperating across culture. For each cultural difference we have placed people from Denmark, Poland and Germany in order to illustrate where they typically are placed in regard to the selected example.

Use scales to position yourself and your colleagues to:

- understand your cultural differences among yourselves
- agree upon how you in a tangible way can work around your cultural differences

Use the tips mentioned below the scales to become better at taking advantage of the benefits inherent in cross-cultural cooperation.

**We each have different backgrounds. Therefore great differences will occur when each person places himself or herself on the scale. It is important that each one of you makes a decision about where you place yourselves on the scale.**

# A cultural difference: Rules



## Rules and standards

## Solutions and exceptions



- Likes to work with systems, standards and rules
- Prefers standardised procedures
- Requires transparency and clarification
- The rules apply to everyone and must be followed by everyone, including my friends
- Expects justice for all no difference made
- Thinks much about the fact that "it is important to know and follow the rules"

- Likes best a pragmatic work approach without too many rules
- Emphasises finding the good solutions more than following the rules
- Helps friends rather than following rules
- Thinks it is OK to make exceptions to the rules
- Thinks much about the fact that things and solutions depend on the situation
- Accepts the fact that things are done in different ways

✓ If necessary put a tick in the boxes where you recognise your own behaviour

## How to make agreements about good rules:

- ✓ Establish which rules have to be followed (legislation, safety requirements, etc.)
- ✓ Be sure that everyone understands the rules that have to be followed
- ✓ Agree on when it is OK to deviate from procedures and rules
- ✓ Agree on how to communicate when solutions are clashing with rules
- ✓ Agree on the expectations to good workplace relationships when rules have to be followed

# A cultural difference: To make decisions



**Hierarchy and formal decisions**

**Flat structure and informal decisions**



- Long way from manager to employee
- Formal way to deal with each other
- We are not all equal and do not all have the same status
- Decisions are to be made by a manager
- It is not my job to make decisions, so I expect to be well informed
- I know my rank in the hierarchy
- It works best when there are strong leaders, who makes decisions

- Short way from manager to employee
- Informal way to deal with each other
- We are all equal and all have something to say, but, of course, the manager has the last word
- Decisions must be made together in the group
- I expect to be involved in discussions about decisions, when changes are to be made
- I have the right to try to change a decision when I think it is wrong
- I accept a majority decision

✓ If necessary put a tick in the boxes where you recognise your own behaviour

**How to make good agreements on how to make decisions:**

- ✓ Agree on in which cases the group should be consulted
- ✓ Create a common understanding of which decisions are made by the manager
- ✓ Agree on which decisions you yourselves can make
- ✓ Agree on (colleague to colleague — and employees to managers) the tone that apply to the workplace

# A cultural difference: Communication Style



**Direct/  
Confrontational**

**Indirect/  
Avoid confrontation**



- Puts it bluntly
- Prefers going directly to the crux of the matter and talk openly about the problem
- Would rather not spend too much time on history and background information – is more interested the message itself
- Conflicts are resolved often directly between colleagues

- Says things indirectly in order not to hurt anyone
- Suggests that there may be something that needs to be talked about
- Prefers to discuss the background and go through the whole situation before getting to the crux of the matter
- Often conflicts are resolved by involving the manager

✓ If necessary put a tick in the boxes where you recognise your own behaviour

How to agree on a common and good way to communicate:

- ✓ Agree on how to communicate about conflicts before they become serious
- ✓ Agree on how to say things straight and in a pleasant manner
- ✓ Agree on what to do when someone tells you something and you are not sure you have understood it correctly
- ✓ Agree on who else you can involve, if you are not sure whether you have understood what has been communicated
- ✓ Remember, it is your obligation to tell if there is something you do not understand. Agree with each other on how to draw attention to the fact that you have some questions

# A cultural difference: Initiative



**Take the initiative**

**Awaiting direction**



- Expects of each other, that you yourself take responsibility for solving a given task and do not wait until you are told to do something
- Takes initiative rather than wait
- Has difficulty idling
- Feels no need for a leader
- Finds it OK to make a mistake
- Expects that dialogue is possible between employee and management
- Self-management – managers show confidence in the employees giving them room to manoeuvre to solve a given task
- If you have finished a task before the end of your working day you continue working by starting on a new

- Solves the task given, and waits for his/her manager to instruct on what else to do
- Accepts delays associated with decisions
- Prefers a leader who shows the way
- Likes to avoid errors that occur because you do things that you have not been instructed to do
- Sticks to established schedules and sticks accurately to procedure descriptions
- Works with own areas of responsibilities and does not interfere in others' work
- Only gives a hand with tasks outside own field of work if told/instructed to do so.

✓ If necessary put a tick in the boxes where you recognise your own behaviour

How much initiative should we expect from each other:

- ✓ Agree on when you on your own initiative should help with tasks outside your own field of work
- ✓ Agree on which initiatives you do not need to put into practice
- ✓ Share the good examples of initiatives which you would like to see in the workplace

# A cultural difference: Information to immediate manager



**Inform/involve  
management**

**Wait to inform, to you will  
be asked**



- On a regular basis informs and gives status to the manager even when there are no problems
- Tells manager about ideas, thoughts and concerns
- Tells manager when there is something he/she do not understand or cannot figure out
- Organisations often have short chains of command, flat hierarchies and managers who operate informally

- Only informs the manager when necessary or when/if there are problems
- Works on the assumption that the less the manager is disturbed the better
- Does not say anything to the manager if there is something he/she does not understand or cannot figure out. Asks colleagues instead
- Organisations are often hierarchical, and managers act authoritarian

✓ If necessary put a tick in the boxes where you recognise your own behaviour

How to inform management in a good way:

- ✓ Clarify what management wants to be informed about and why
- ✓ Clarify what management does not want to be informed about and why
- ✓ Agree on how management is informed
- ✓ Agree on what to do when you have a good idea or a proposal

## Three easy steps towards good cross-cultural cooperation:

- 1** To recognise the differences and accept that cultural differences are a part of daily life
  - Be curious and open minded in correlation with how your colleagues act
- 2** Be curious and express diversity
  - E.g.: "How do employees communicate with managers in my culture compared to your culture?"
- 3** Make agreements on concrete behaviour. Find solutions that suit all
  - E.g.: "How do we inform each other?" or "What do I do if I do not know what I need to do?"



# In brief:

## How to harness opportunities in cross-cultural cooperation



The basis for good working relationships with people from different cultures is curiosity and acceptance of diversity. Diversity is a strength, when you know how to extract the best of several worlds.

This requires that we verbalise and find solutions that both parties understand and which makes sense.

Understanding why a certain communication and behaviour take place, is the key to being able to change habits, which are created on the basis of your own cultural background.

“World class interaction” is prepared by Kødindustriens Arbejdsudvalg in cooperation with the consultancy People & Performance.

**Kødindustriens Arbejds miljøudvalg** is a sub-committee of the Branchearbejds miljørådet (BAR) Jord til Bord, which is responsible for informing and advising about occupational health and safety conditions.

**People & Performance A/S** is a Danish consultancy working with organisational and leadership development and in consequence also looking into interaction between different cultures at the workplace.

*Special thanks for input, inspiration and review to:*

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The guide is available for download at [www.baujordtilbord.dk/slagteri-og-koedbranchen](http://www.baujordtilbord.dk/slagteri-og-koedbranchen), under Tools.

Feedback or questions to the guide can be directed to:

- *DI, Annette Hoffmann*
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**Hope you get on well with your work**

