



# COMMUNICATION

## STYLES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

WORDS: [NATASHA HORRELT](#)

### UNDERSTANDING THE WAY OTHER CULTURES NEGOTIATE AND LEAD THEIR TEAMS CAN HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS. WE BREAK IT DOWN AND EXAMINE THOSE MOST PREVALENT IN PHUKET

It's no secret that, when dealing with a multicultural community like Phuket, there are countless miscommunications and misperceptions. One can blame it on a lack of communication altogether but perhaps, more aptly, it is actually a complete difference in communication style. Business negotiations with one culture will vary significantly in comparison to others.

British linguist Richard D. Lewis has spent a lifetime analyzing and charting communication patterns and leadership styles. His book, "When Cultures Collide," is in its third edition and provides some mind-

blowing insight. This is the guy big clients like BMW turn to when they need help connecting with top leaders from other countries. It helps that Lewis speaks ten languages.

"By focusing on the cultural roots of national behavior, both in society and business, we can foresee and calculate with a surprising degree of accuracy how others will react to our plans for them, and we can make certain assumptions as to how they will approach us," explains his book.

"A working knowledge of the basic traits

of other cultures (as well as our own will minimize unpleasant surprises, give us insights in advance, and enable us to interact successfully with nationalities with whom we previously had difficulty."

Perhaps the first thought that springs to mind is the idea that maybe such analysis stereotypes a culture. Lewis says this simply isn't the case and that it can be done fairly. He asserts that a national norm provides a baseline and his conclusions are fascinating.

For instance, when meeting with Americans Lewis says one can expect them to lay all their cards on the table and resolve issues as quickly as possible, but get upset at disagreements. Whereas the French prefer robust logical debates.

The linguist breaks countries down into three main groups of communication styles:

**Linear-actives** - this group likes to plan and organize. They keep things on schedule and do one thing at a time. They usually stick to the facts and written words are important. They use restrained body language and are polite but direct. Germans and Swiss are in this group.

**Multi-actives** - these lively people do many things at once. They plan priorities

based on importance and excitement and not necessarily to a time schedule. They are emotional and they can be confrontational. They put feelings before fact and spoken word is very important. Italians and Latin Americans are members of this group.

**Reactives** - this group prioritizes courtesy and respect. They listen quietly and calmly and react carefully. Statements are promises and they like face-to-face contact. They react to the action of others and are not confrontational. Chinese, Japanese and Finns are in this group.

Lewis has taken his research even further and analyzed the specific leadership traits of managers from around the world. We've chosen just a few of the commonly seen nationalities in Phuket to examine more closely. Keep in mind that this is the opinion of Lewis based on his research and doesn't necessarily reflect ours:

British managers are more casual, helpful, and willing to compromise but Lewis says they can be ruthless when required. He explains that sometimes their belief in tradition can give them trouble when dealing with others who have different values.

American managers are more aggressive and goal-oriented. They are confident



and ready for change. They can handle teamwork but their first interest is in getting ahead themselves.

East Asian countries like Thailand tend to believe that the group is sacred. Leaders are often seen as benevolent.

Russian leaders use key people and personal alliances to bypass the system to achieve good results. They have learned that using official channels may not work due to bureaucracy.

Australian managers (much like Swedes) like to sit side-by-side with their workers. Once it's a given that they won't pull rank they actually have a lot more influence. This happens even more than with the Swedish because of the somewhat American nature of Australian business which sees them make decisions more quickly.

Spanish leaders (like our publisher Michael Earle) are like the French and tend to be very charismatic (see what I did there?).

They can be autocratic and pride themselves on their personal influence on staff.

It would be interesting to note how operating outside of the home country changes one's management style. It isn't far-fetched to think that a manager from America who has worked in Thailand for a number of years will soon realize his approach might not work as well here as it does at home. That is, perhaps, the ultimate point of Lewis' book - to encourage people to look outside themselves for better relationships with others.

"By focusing on the cultural roots of national behavior, both in society and business, we can foresee and calculate with a surprising degree of accuracy how others will react to our plans for them, and we can make certain assumptions as to how they will approach us."

Seems like the perfect book to shed some light on the cultural explosion within Phuket.

### CULTURAL TYPES: THE LEWIS MODEL

