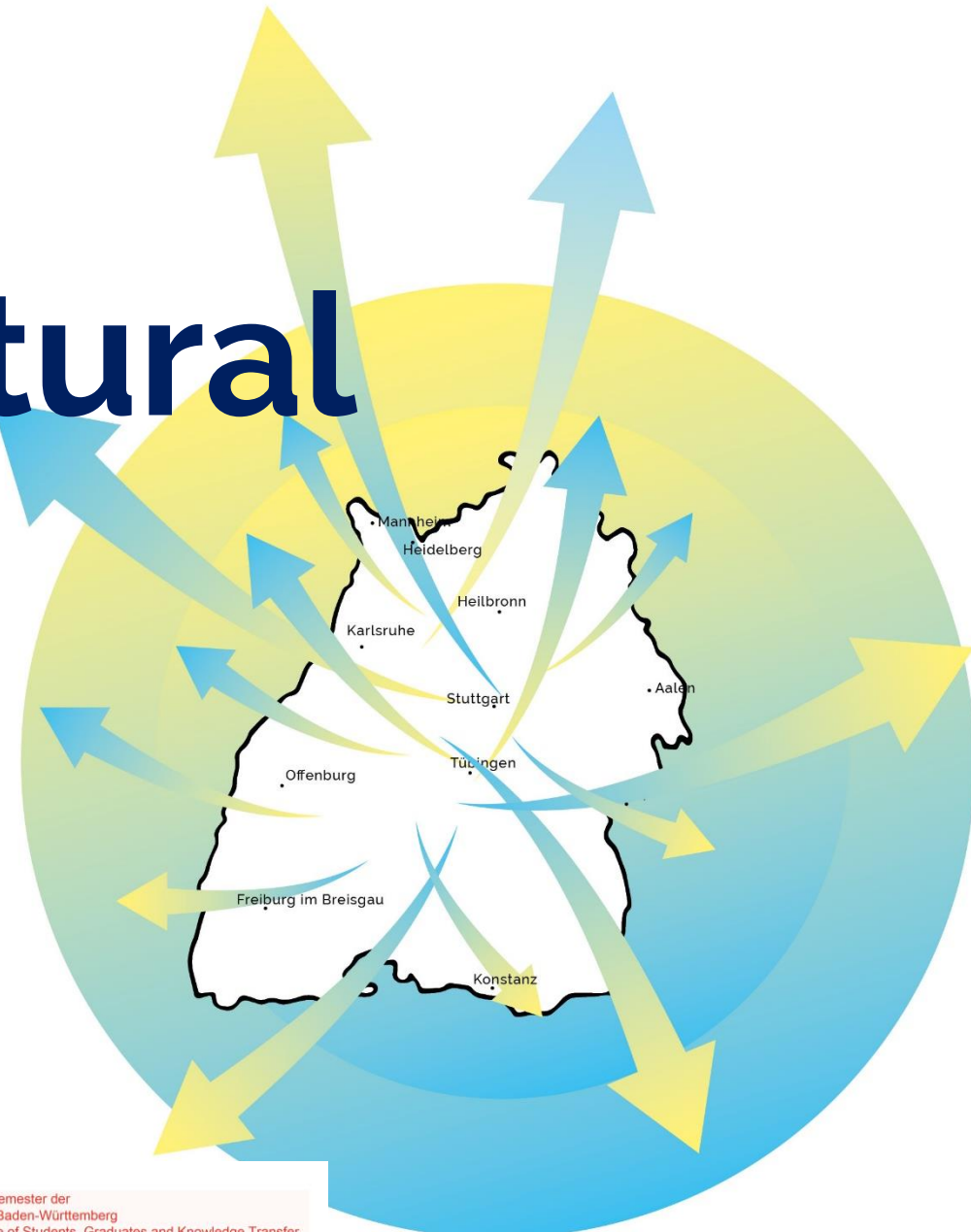


Intercultural Briefing



Be well prepared for your adventure!



Preparation is key



Working in a foreign country will be very different from experiences made during vacation or even study periods abroad. To have a successful and valuable traineeship you should **prepare yourself properly**. This questionnaire will help you to think about some key factors that we have found as critical in former traineeships.

Everyone of us is a member of a culture, i.e. everyone of us has an own interpretation of what is right or wrong in his or her culture. Spoken metaphorically, everyone sees his environment through his or her “cultural glasses”. One has to be aware of these “cultural glasses” in order **to act and behave correctly** in a foreign country or when working in an international team.

Some might say that working in one of the European countries does not differ to working in Germany.

Do you agree?...

Body language

Question 1



In Germany, shaking the head up and down means “yes” and moving the head from right to left means “no”.

What do you think?

A) Shaking the head up and down means all over the world “yes”

B) In some cultures shaking the head up and down means “no”

Body language

Answer to Question 1



B) In some cultures shaking the head up and down means “no”

In **Bulgaria**, moving one's head from left to right means “yes” and up and down means “no”. Also in **Turkey** and **Greece** the gestures of “yes” and “no” might lead to intercultural misunderstandings.

Hierarchy



Question 2

Hierarchy defines the power distance between the executive and the employees. The core question is: Are all team members involved in the decision making process or is the executive the one and only who is allowed to decide?

In comparison to an equivalent company/institution in my home country, I expect that the hierarchy between the management and the employees in my host organisation will be

- A) very different – different
- B) not different at all

Hierarchy

Answer to Question 2

A) Very different – different

In some cultures the level of hierarchy is more accepted or even expected than in other cultures. For instance, our **French neighbours** are used to a greater level of power distance in working life than the Germans do.



Way of communication



Question 3

Is information / communicated directly or indirectly?

Undertaking a traineeship abroad means that

A) I observe my colleagues and observe how they present their information / criticism

B) I don't reflect my communication style, I just act like in a German company / in a team with only German colleagues

Way of communication



In the **United Kingdom** the way of communication is often more indirect. This is contrary to the direct way of communication in Germany. The British set value on politeness and use a multiplicity of indirect communication strategies. If those are ignored by others (e.g. speakers of other languages) this often leads to a failure of collaboration.

In the English language linguistic indices are often treated more diplomatic and sensitive than in German. Therefore, it is recommended, to express requests, desires or instructions in using modal verbs („could you“ or „would you“) rather than in indicative mode („can you“).

Criticism, claims and discussions have to be used with care. The British way to debate is not as confrontational as the German, but rather reserved and respectful; direct criticism is often interpreted as presumptuous and conceited.

Source: DAAD

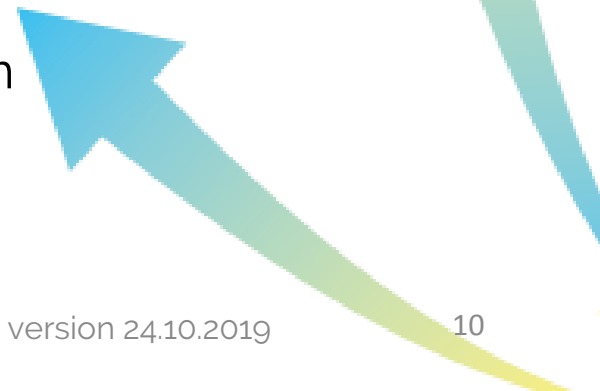
The Iceberg Model



Of course, these are only examples which can't be generalised for all members of a nation or a culture. Keep in mind that cultural differences do exist even though they might not be obvious at first sight.

Culture consists of many aspects; only some of which are **visible** and only partially accessible for outsiders; the majority stays **invisible**.

The iceberg is a good comparison: Only the tip is visible, the majority of the iceberg remains hidden under the surface of the water.



Visible and invisible elements of culture



In terms of culture this means that for example language, dress, food, gestures, art or architecture are visible and can be seen in the physical sense. These are the elements that we come into contact with when we dive into a new country or culture.

On the other hand, there is the bottom side of the iceberg, the invisible aspects that build the underlying causes of what can be seen on the visible side. These might be habits, expectations, motivations, attitudes, values, wishes and fears, religious beliefs or gender differences. Both parts of culture influence each other and cannot be understood without each other.

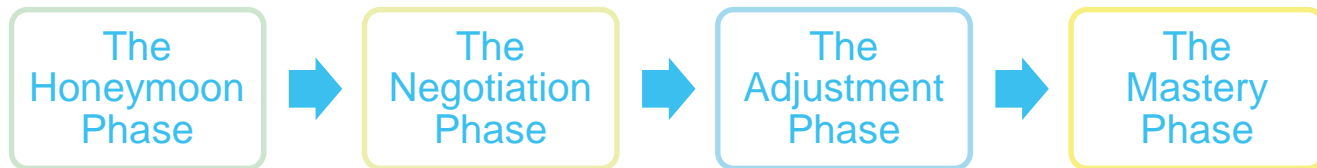
So please bear in mind, that people or situations might be different and a lot more complex than they might seem to you at first sight.

Culture shock – four phase model



Even though one knows about the cultural differences it is likely that one will face certain **ambiguities and difficulties** while working and living in a foreign country.

In this connection we would like to introduce the term **culture shock**, which was introduced by the anthropologist Cora DuBois in 1951. On this basis, the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg developed a **four phase model**. Although this might not apply for everybody, there are some stages many people go through while living and working abroad:



Culture shock – four phase model



Honeymoon Phase

• In the first few days and weeks of your stay you see the differences between your own and the new culture in a “romantic light”. You experience emotions like excitement and euphoria and you are overwhelmed with new impressions. You are fascinated by different food, the architecture and the way people live.

Negotiation Phase

• You learn that not everything of the new culture is ideal. You have already dropped a brick (Fettnäpfchen!) in face to face encounters and you may feel exhausted and homesick.

Adjustment Phase

• You have developed an understanding of the aspects (behaviour/ways of communication) that differ from the way things work in your own country. You can rely on the support of new friends and colleagues what makes it easier to handle difficult situations in which you didn't feel comfortable before.

Mastery Phase

• You have integrated in the new culture and are likely to adopt certain codes of conduct. You may even feel “at home”

You might not come across or feel all these characteristics, but this model might help you to understand your emotional state while you are abroad.



Curious? → Further information

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

If you wish further information on **intercultural topics and/or more insights in the culture of the country** you are going to, please use the information provided by the eu-community (German Academic Exchange Service).

<http://eu-community.daad.de/index.php?id=39>



The Council of British Chambers and Commerce in Europe has also a compilation of a wealth of information and resources on market specific business etiquette and manners of the European countries:

<http://www.cobcoe.eu/business-culture-and-etiquette-across-europe/>