

Introduction

Irina Targonskaia

Managing international projects for over 10 years

- Campuses for British International schools
- Logistic Hub in France for Zalando
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Focus: strategic planning, managing cross-functional teams, sustainability







Managing across cultures

Managing international
projects (France /
Germany)



Goals

-  **1** Share learnings from managing international projects between HQ and local site
-  **2** Explore cultural dimensions of France vs Germany
-  **3** Offer practical tools, checklists, and motivation to improve international collaboration
-  **4** Q & A

Project intro



- **140,000 m² state-of-the-art fulfillment center** near Paris as part of Zalando's European logistics expansion
- Over 300m EUR CAPEX investment
- BREEAM® Excellent certification
- Creating up to 2,000 jobs

International Projects: A complex Puzzle

- Map: HQ in Germany, project site in France
- Challenges: legal frameworks, work ethics, communication
- Importance of bridging distance — not just physical, but cultural



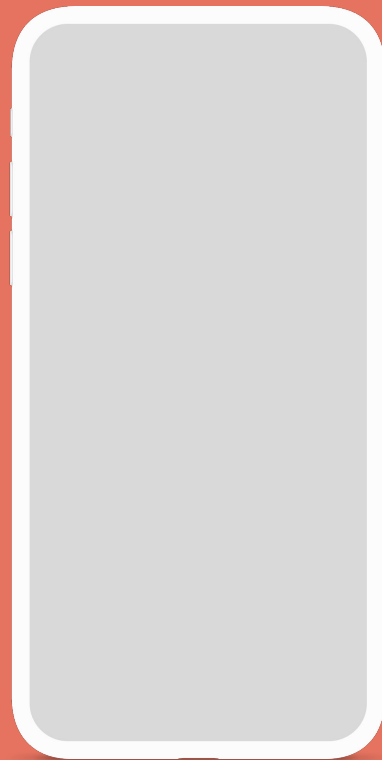
Role of the cultural awareness

1. What it means to “be aware” of culture
2. Why assumptions based on efficiency or hierarchy can backfire
3. Culture ≠ just language — it’s about logic, expectations, values

4.

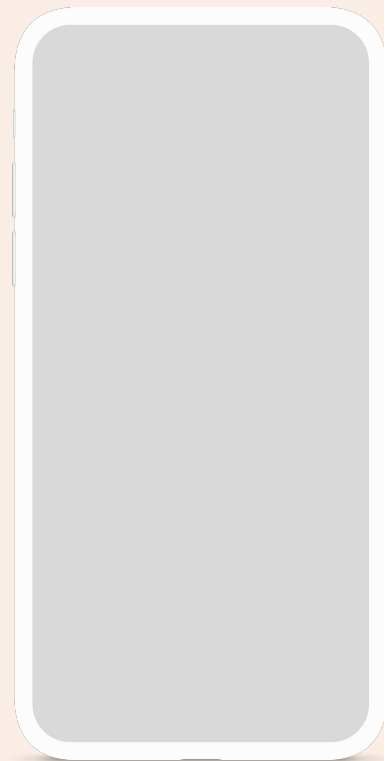
“In France, conversations are debates. In Germany, they're exchanges of information.”

- Misunderstanding this can derail meetings and written communication.



Communication Codes: Bonjour First

- The cultural ritual of greeting ("bonjour") sets the tone
- French value intellectual debate; criticism is normal, even expected
- Germans may interpret this as inefficiency or confrontation
- **Takeaway:** Learning local discourse patterns reduces friction



Case Snapshot: Logistics Hub in France (From HQ in Germany)



Initial assumptions:

- Timelines
- Reporting styles
- Hierarchy

Culture gap revealed in

- Site meetings approach
- Team alignments
- Mistake tolerance
- Vendor expectations

Success came when:

Local French leadership empowered, meeting localized and communication style adapted

Importance of Local Expertise



Tools and Techniques

- Cultural interpreters on the ground
- Get the local lawyer
- Formal titles and decorum are more important than in Germany
- Local authorities and local press

- **Intercultural Checklists** (when starting a project):
 - Team map (location, culture, native language)
 - Key rituals (greetings, meetings, feedback)
 - Communication preferences
 - Authority structure
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Cloud-based PM tools, shared calendars with time zones, async documentation
- **Feedback loops** — schedule cultural retrospectives

Trusted relationships take time in France - *"la confiance se mérite"*

Synchronized vs A-synchronized Work

- Tools: Miro, MS Teams, Asana, Slack - **but culture affects how they're used**
- Video calls vs written communication
- Power distance: who speaks up in meetings, who escalates issues
- Cultural fluency can reduce micro-frictions over time



Celebrate Success

Why Celebrations Matter

- Reinforce **team cohesion** and shared identity - essential across cultural and geographic distances
- Acknowledge **milestones** and progress, not just final outcomes
- Boost morale and motivation, especially in distributed and asynchronous teams
- Signal appreciation and **respect for local customs and achievements**
- Make success public: internal press releases and corp comms



Key takeaways

- Cultural awareness is not optional in global projects
- Local expertise and adapted communication styles are critical
- Use tools mindfully - support both synchronicity and independence
- Checklists + curiosity = recipe for success

Literature recommendations

- *The Bonjour Effect* – Julie Barlow & Jean-Benoît Nadeau
- *The Culture Map* – Erin Meyer
- *When Cultures Collide* – Richard Lewis
- *Managing Across Cultures* – Charlene Solomon, Michael Schell

Q&A

Any questions?

Irina to add personal
information / QR



Thank You!