To assess where your own culture falls on this scale, ask yourself the question: 'If someone in your culture disagrees strongly with your idea, does that suggest they are disapproving of you or just the idea?'

In more confrontational cultures, it seems quite natural to attack someone's opinion without attacking that person. In avoid-confrontation societies, these two things are tightly interconnected.

In Japan, for instance, it is considered deeply impolite to challenge or refute another person's point of view openly or publicly. Even the slightest deviation from the other person's perspective must be made by the subtlest hint in order to preserve group harmony.

By contrast, in more confrontational cultures, disagreement is regarded not as a matter of personal emotion, but rather as a valuable intellectual exercise from which new ideas, information and truth emerge.
The extent to which the less powerful members of organisations accept and expect power to be distributed unequally—what is defined as power distance—varies vastly across cultures.

In more egalitarian societies, for example, it is okay to disagree with the boss openly in front of others; people are likely to move to action without getting the boss’s okay and can reach out to colleagues several levels below or above them.

By contrast, in more hierarchical cultures, effort is made to defer to the boss’s opinion (especially in public); acquiring boss’s approval before moving to action is crucial and communication usually follows strict hierarchical lines.

While in egalitarian cultures an aura of authority stems from acting like one of the team, in hierarchical cultures an aura of authority tends to come from setting yourself clearly apart. How much respect is shown to an authority figure in your culture?
In some cultures, higher value is placed on building consensus as part of the decision-making process, while in others, decision making is largely invested in the individual. These differing styles of decision making have a dramatic impact on the timeline of a typical project. In a consensual culture, the decision making may take quite a long time, since everyone is consulted. But once the decision has been made, the implementation is quite rapid, since everyone has completely bought in and the decision is fixed and inflexible - a decision with a capital D, we might say.

By contrast, in a top-down culture, the decision-making responsibility is invested in an individual. Here, decisions tend to be made quickly, early in the process, by one person. But each decision is also flexible - a decision with a lowercase d. As more discussions occur and new information arises, decisions may be easily revisited or altered, which means that implementation can take a long time.

**WORD OF THE WEEK**

Ta’arof

(Iranian noun) ‘You go first’, says Mr A as he meets Mr B at the doorstep. ‘No, it’s not possible, you go first’, Mr B insists in response.

Ta’arof dictates a ritual that may see them both waiting for a couple of unnecessary minutes before one steps forward. It is an etiquette that is seen almost in all aspects of Iranian life, from hosts insisting on guests taking more food from the table to the exchanges in the bazaar.
In the United States and other Anglo-Saxon cultures, people are trained (mostly subconsciously) to communicate as literally and explicitly as possible. Good communication is all about clarity and explicitness, and accountability for accurate transmission of the message is placed firmly on the communicator: ‘If you don’t understand, it’s my fault’.

By contrast, in many Asian cultures, including India, China, Japan, and Indonesia, messages are often conveyed implicitly, requiring the listener to read between the lines. Good communication is subtle, layered, and may depend on copious subtext, with responsibility for transmission of the message shared between the one seeing the message and the one receiving it.

The same applies to many African cultures, including those found in Kenya and Zimbabwe, and to a lesser degree Latin American cultures (such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina) and Latin European cultures (such as Spain, Italy, Portugal) including Portugal. What is your preferred communication style?