



When
YIN
Meets
YANG

CULTURAL INSIGHTS ON

Business Communication in
Israel & Singapore

Meital Baruch

WELCOME TO OUR BRIEF CROSS-CULTURAL GUIDE!

This guide is designed to enhance your cultural awareness of how Israelis and Singaporeans communicate in the workplace. It provides an overview of eight (8) cultural differences in communication styles between these two countries.

Whether you are planning to do business, study, or travel in either country, this guide will help you understand the cultural nuances that influence how people communicate both professionally and personally.

To gain a deeper understanding and practical advice on navigating these differences effectively, please reach out to us. We would be happy to assist you in bridging cultural gaps and finding effective strategies that work for you.



**Yours globally,
Meital Baruch
Managing Director
Global Mindsets**



WARNING!

As you read through this guide, please remember to approach cultural differences with thoughtfulness, sensitivity and respect. Here are three tips to keep in mind when engaging with any cultural guides:

Treat people as individuals

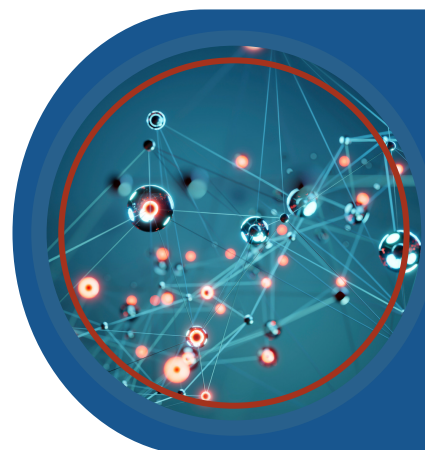
Cultural guides should be viewed as a valuable starting point for discussion and reflection rather than a definitive source of information. The communication styles described here represent the average behavioural tendencies of each group and may not apply to every individual within that group. It's important to avoid making assumptions or stereotypes about an entire group and to remember that each individual is unique and cultural diversity exists not only between but also within countries.

Human Behaviour is Complex

Although this guide offers cultural explanations for behaviours, it is essential to acknowledge that human behaviour is not solely determined by our cultural background. Other factors, such as personality, age, gender, education, organizational culture and more, may also play an important role in shaping our actions. Therefore, it's crucial to consider these multiple influences when seeking to understand human behaviour.

Culture is Dynamic

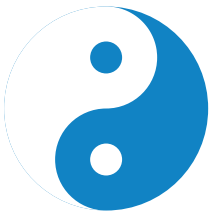
Culture is not a static concept, but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving aspect of human society. Cultures change over time due to various factors, such as globalization, technological advancements, migration, and social and economic developments. As cultures evolve, new beliefs, values, and communication styles may emerge, and these changes can be fascinating to explore.





"To thrive in today's global world, it is necessary not only to navigate the complex business environment but also to understand the complexity of human behaviour."

-- Meital Baruch



THE ISRAELI COMMUNICATION STYLE

- 1 Command
- 2 Oversharing
- 3 Be proud
- 4 Speak together
- 5 To your face
- 6 Express
- 7 Think loud
- 8 Humorous



THE SINGAPOREAN COMMUNICATION STYLE

- 1 Request
- 2 Sharing over time
- 3 Be humble
- 4 Speak in turns
- 5 Saving face
- 6 Suppress
- 7 Pause to think
- 8 Serious





01

COMMAND

Israelis tend to communicate in a concise manner. Although being an egalitarian society, the military culture has greatly influenced their daily conversations. As a result, Israelis may come across as if they are giving orders when in fact, they are simply making a request. They are also comfortable with using brief language. For example, receiving a one-word email response such as "yes" or "no" is not uncommon. While this may come across as harsh or abrupt, it's simply a cultural preference for being efficient with time and getting to the point quickly.



REQUEST

Singaporeans are used to communicate more softly. Despite the hierarchical nature of their society, it predominantly reflects a civilian culture marked by collaborative conversations. While corresponding with others, they tend to use questions rather than commands. They may also provide more contextual information for the request and use longer descriptions to explain their actions and thoughts. This approach serves not only to enhance clarity and ensure politeness but also to mitigate the risk of potential misunderstandings.



2

oversharing
vs **sharing over
time**



02

OVERSHARING

The well-known local phrase "**All Israel are friends**" illustrates the open and welcoming nature of Israeli society. Israelis are known for their warmth and lack of shyness. They are often at ease approaching strangers and striking up a conversation and are equally comfortable expressing their opinions and sharing personal information with people they have just met. These qualities create a sense of friendliness in social and business interactions and can help build trusting relationships quickly.



SHARING OVER TIME

In **Singapore**, individuals place a strong emphasis on maintaining a distant attitude in their interactions with strangers. They tend to be more cautious and guarded when first meeting new people, particularly in business settings and often present themselves in a more formal manner. However, as trust and familiarity are cultivated over time, they may begin to open up and reveal additional aspects of their personal lives. This process of establishing trust can take time, but once achieved, it can lead to deep relationships.





be proud

vs

be humble



03

BE PROUD

Israelis are familiar with boosting their value proposition and may even enjoy positioning themselves as number one in their field. They often use competitive language to showcase their work achievements and are comfortable with self-promotion. The Israeli culture also emphasizes the importance of individuality and self-expression from a young age and encourages children to have self-confidence and a desire to stand out. As a result, impressing Israelis can sometimes be challenging due to their mindset of 'I know best'.



BE HUMBLE

Singaporeans highly value humility despite living in a very competitive society. From a young age, conformity is emphasized, and being modest is seen as an important trait. While striving to achieve impressive accomplishments, Singaporeans tend to attribute success to the group rather than individual efforts and are less comfortable with public recognition. Even with vast experience, they maintain a humble approach and a 'willing to learn' mindset, continually seeking to improve themselves and their work.

4

speak together
vs **speak in turns**



04

SPEAK TOGETHER

Israelis place a high value on speaking (much less on listening) and may tend to repeat their ideas to emphasize their message. In conversations, it is common for people to interrupt each other and for the conversation to be overlapping. From the Israeli perspective, cutting each other off signifies that people are fully engaged in the discussion, and the more people "interfere" with each other - the more passionate they are about the ongoing conversation. The overlapping speaking style in Israel also reflects the culture's tendency towards a sense of urgency, with many Israelis finding it challenging to deal with long waiting queues.



SPEAK IN TURNS

Singaporeans place a strong emphasis on the importance of listening skills. In Singapore, conversations are typically structured, with individuals taking turns to speak, while others listen attentively. From the Singaporean perspective, avoiding interruptions and carefully considering what others say is perceived as a sign of respect and in some situations, people may even prefer to wait for an invitation to speak. The ability to listen thoroughly to others may also reflect the patience of the culture, as Singaporeans are known for their ability to stand in long queues for extended periods of time.



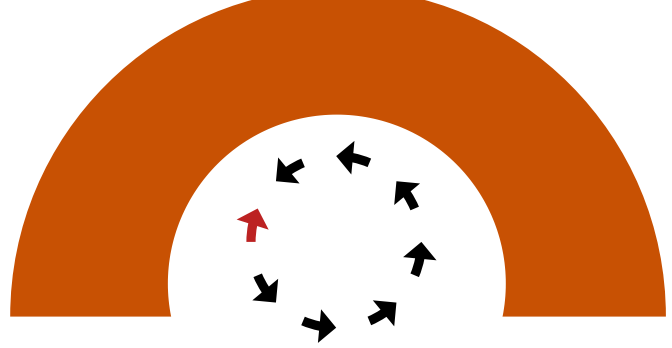
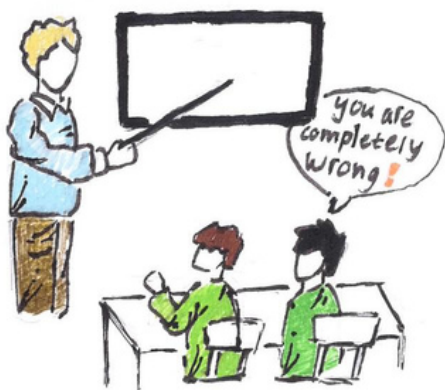




5

TO YOUR FACE

Israelis are known as one of the most straightforward communicators globally. This is because being "dugri" (super direct) is seen as a sign of honesty and thus highly regarded. They might be more focused on getting their thoughts and ideas across, taking less time to carefully choose their words or consider the potential impact of their statements. This habit can result in messages that are unintentionally hurtful or insensitive. They also value 'healthy' debates and confrontations as part of daily interactions, considering their argumentative mindset as positive for sharpening thinking and clarifying assumptions. Openly disagreeing with others in public is seen as being engaged in discussion and can even be helpful for building trust.



SAVING FACE

Singaporeans tend to be more cautious with their words and focus on how to convey their message softly without causing offence or discomfort to others. They believe that some things are better left unsaid, especially when it may cause others to 'lose face', which is an essential concept in many Asian cultures. Direct confrontation and open conflicts are not valued in Singaporean work culture, as they can disrupt group harmony, where maintaining relationships is considered more important than being completely honest. Sometimes, this indirectness might be perceived by others as confusing or misleading. Singaporeans tend to express disagreement tactfully, often by sharing their general views or asking questions. Criticizing others in public is avoided, and private discussion is preferred.



Express
VS **Suppress**



06

EXPRESS

In **Israeli** culture, it's considered natural to express feelings at work and is mostly perceived as being an authentic self. Israelis' loud and emotional voice may represent their passion and interest in the discussion or signal a disagreement. They tend to use vivid facial expressions and strong hand movements to convey their message. They are also known for their warm personalities and may even touch others during face-to-face conversations. In formal settings, Israelis typically greet each other with a handshake, while in more informal situations, it is common to greet people with a hug, kiss, or tap on the shoulder, adding to the overall sense of openness in Israeli society.



SUPRESS

In **Singapore**, it is generally considered inappropriate to express emotions in a business context. Singaporeans tend to hold back their feelings, believing that being emotional is unprofessional and should be avoided. Emotions are often seen as something that may negatively affect logical thinking or make others feel uncomfortable. As a result, they tend to communicate in a calm and composed manner, even in the face of unexpected setbacks or disagreements. Handshaking is a widely recognized form of greeting in formal settings, while a simple wave, nod, or smile is often used as a casual greeting gesture that demonstrates a more reserved culture.



7

think loud
vs **pause to think**



07

THINK LOUD

In **Israeli** culture, moments of silence during conversations are relatively rare. Silence is often interpreted as a lack of engagement or interest in the discussion. Israelis tend to think loudly, speaking their minds freely and without hesitation. In meetings, they often propose 'raw' ideas that are not fully formed or polished, with the intention of brainstorming and refining them through discussion. It's important to note that these initial ideas are not necessarily promises or commitments but rather a starting point for further exploration and development.



PAUSE TO THINK

In **Singaporean** culture, silence is often seen as an integral part of communication. Singaporeans are generally comfortable with using silence as a strategic tool to convey a range of messages, such as disagreement, respect, or the need for further consideration. Additionally, Singaporeans tend to think carefully and thoroughly about their ideas before discussing them. They don't rush to share their thoughts. Instead, they prefer to listen and understand what others have to say before offering their opinions and may only choose to share solid ideas.



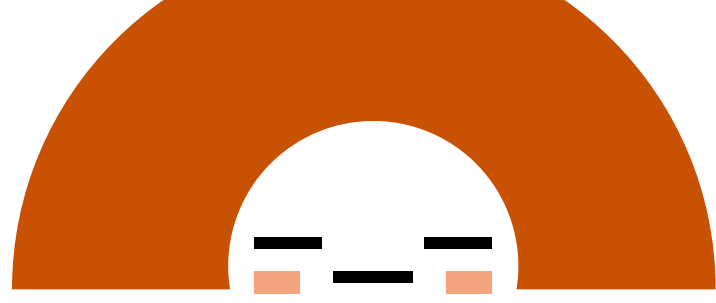
humorous
vs **serious**



08

HUMOROUS

Humour plays a significant role in **Israeli** business culture and is often used to build connections between people. Having a sense of humour is generally seen as a positive trait in Israeli workplaces and does not diminish one's professionalism. Israelis tend to appreciate humour that includes sarcasm, cynicism, parody, and even dark humour, which may not translate well to other cultures. Satire is a common feature of Israeli humour and is often used to challenge authority and highlight political, social, and cultural issues. Humour has become an existential matter for Israelis, serving as a means of survival and a defence mechanism.

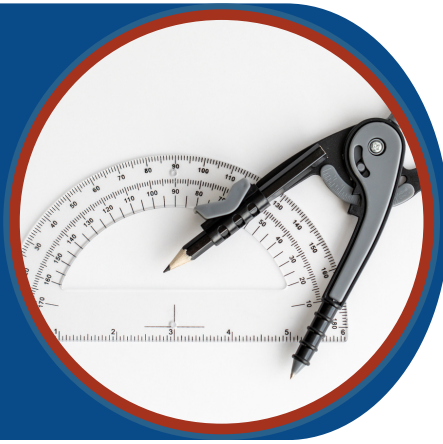


SERIOUS

In **Singapore**, while humour is appreciated, it is typically not a central aspect of business meetings. Business is taken seriously, and distractions, such as jokes, are generally not very common. While people may laugh or smile at others' jokes out of politeness, respect, or even embarrassment, humour is not typically used to build rapport or break the ice in meetings. Outside work, Singaporeans often appreciate less nuanced humour rather than subtle or ironic humour and take things quite literally. Their humour tends to be more gentle and playful, focus more on light-hearted entertainment and draw more heavily on local traditions and pop culture references.

final thoughts

"THE BEAUTY OF THE OPPOSITES"

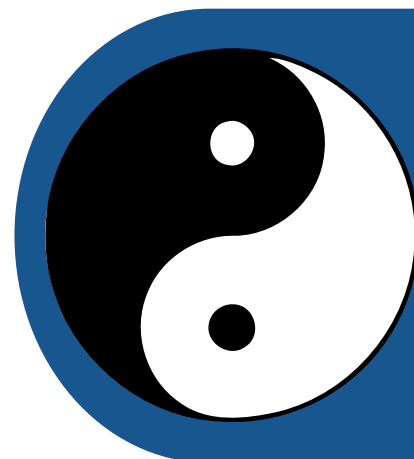


While preparing this guide, my original plan was to draw a comparison between Singaporean and Israeli cultures by presenting them as two extremes on a spectrum. This type of dichotomous thinking is common in Western analytics culture, where things are often viewed as either black or white.

However, after living in Asia for over fifteen years, I realised that there must be a more nuanced and inclusive way to present the two cultures. Instead of viewing them as 180-degree opposites, I wanted to explore how they could complement each other, so I shifted from an "either-or" mindset to a "both-and" mindset. This led me to the concept of Yin and Yang, which recognises that opposing forces are interconnected and interdependent.

While Israel and Singapore may seem like opposites in some ways, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can learn from each other and benefit from their differences. By adopting a Yin and Yang mindset, I hope to provide a more balanced and holistic approach to help us collaborate more effectively and better understand each other's perspectives.

As you can see in the image below, the black side has a white dot and the white side has a black dot, representing the idea that things are never purely black or white. By acknowledging and embracing the distinctive traits of each culture, we can strive to create a disruptive yet harmonious business environment that values diversity and promotes inclusivity.



About the Author



Meital Baruch is an Organizational Consultant, Corporate Trainer, Professional Speaker, and Author. Her expertise is focused on cultural intelligence and global leadership across international boundaries.

In 2014, Meital founded Global Mindsets, inspired by a mission to help people and organizations promote collaboration, adaptability, and genuine connection across cultures. Operating internationally and across multiple industries, she has been leading learning and development processes for various organizations, supporting them in designing, implementing, and evaluating result-oriented solutions tailored to their needs.

Bringing her corporate HR experience and driven by genuine will and passion, Meital actively helps people and organizations bridge cultural gaps, develop global leadership talents, and enhance collaboration in multicultural teams. She works with organizations ranging from MNCs and SMEs to start-up companies and educational institutions.

In 2020, she co-published a white paper titled 'LEADING IN THE AGE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: Challenges and Recommendations,' which identifies the major challenges faced by Asian-based leaders in building, managing, and leading multicultural teams. This paper also offers invaluable insights and actionable recommendations for overcoming global leadership challenges.

Meital holds a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the City University of New York. She is also a certified CQ facilitator by the Cultural Intelligence Center. Meital is a member of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) and serves on the boards of Asia Professional Speakers Singapore (APSS) and Market For Good.



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