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**IMIGRACE DO ČESKÉ REPUBLIKY “FROM LOW TO
HIGH CONTEXT”**

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**IMMIGRATION TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC FROM
LOW TO HIGH CONTEXT**

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Plzeň 2019

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V Plzni dne 16.6.2019

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Iva Prior

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Abstract

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“from Low to High Context”

Supervisor: William Bradley Vice, Ph.D.

This undergraduate thesis deals with differences in communication styles and cultures according to categorizations of cultures of high and low context.

It is divided into three main chapters. Chapter 1 called Culture and Communication explains the concept of culture, high and low context and summarizes E.T. Hall’s book titled *Beyond Culture*. It continues with Chapter 2 called CQ Intelligence discovering the concept of CQ intelligence as being closely connected with the high and low context cultures. Chapter 3 is called Real Life Experience and it includes my own experience examples and a summary and comparison from a questionnaire that gathers the real life experience of several other Anglo-Czech long-term romantic partnerships (low context cultures such as Australia, Canada, USA and England), either with the residency in the Czech Republic or in an English speaking country. These real life examples will serve as clues or things that a person might encounter when interacting on a cross cultural level and to strengthen one’s CQ intelligence. The main aim of the thesis is uncover what is beneath visible culture, use the theoretical base, my own real life experience and the questionnaire with real life experience of others and finally compare the experiences that were encountered at the cultural level what way it differs and to what extend it corresponds.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION..... 1

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION..... 5

Culture.....5

Beyond Culture.....6

High and Low Context.....8

CQ INTELLIGENCE.....12

REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE.....20

CONCLUSION.....29

REFERENCES.....31

SUMMARY IN CZECH.....33

APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire34

APPENDIX 2: Volunteers’ real life experience.....35

INTRODUCTION

When I first heard about high and low context culture it made me think of culture differences on a different level than I had ever thought of in my fifteen years of marriage with a Canadian and this is what triggered writing the thesis. Many misunderstandings and misinterpretations that we used to have, with hindsight slowly started clicking in and proved what I had learnt about high and low context culture. It brought back a statement that my ex-Canadian husband made shortly after we met when he told me about him dating an American girlfriend for a few years and after they split up, she said one of the reasons of their break-up was that they were so culturally different. I didn't pay much of attention to this strange reason as it seemed at the time. One would think that Americans and Canadians are not too different since they are so closely connected. They share the same language and are close geographically. Yet both of the countries are so big that the differences that can cause difficulties might not be obvious at first look or thought. It started to make more sense to me when looking at it from the view of the iceberg metaphor by David Livermore when talking about human behavior: "The tip of the iceberg, visible above sea level, includes things universally shared by all humanity. But when you begin to go deeper, you find there are a slew of differences attributable to varying cultures and individual personalities" (Livermore, 2010, p.71). What he says with the above statement is that there are three categories of human behavior, important for cultural intelligence knowledge: Universal, Cultural and Personal. In the universal part that is above the sea level, visible and understandable to everyone, there are things shared with all the human beings, no matter what nationality you are. (Livermore, 2010, p.71) This is why it may seem strange at the start when thinking there are cultural differences between Canadians and Americans. But according to this metaphor, going deeper to the cultural level that includes things that are visible Cultural Artifacts and Systems such as the way people dress, what they eat, money they use, what customs they are used to etc. and Cultural Values and Assumptions that are beneath of what is visible, things that are unconscious, taken-for granted beliefs, perceptions and feelings. (Livermore, 2010 ,p.71) This invisible level explains that why even seemingly same cultures might face misunderstandings when not taken this invisible level in account. The last completely invisible level of the iceberg is personal and includes our personal differences. These are things that are characteristic to individuals and cannot be taken as cultural behavior. (Livermore, 2010, p.73-74) To what extend the personal level was the cause of a break-up of the relationship between my ex Canadian husband and his American girlfriend and the end of my marriage with him is not known and is not the issue here. The main aim of this thesis is to uncover what is beneath visible culture, to use

my research into anthropology and CQ along with my own real life experience and a questionnaire that gathers the real life experience of several other Anglo-Czech long-term romantic partnerships, and finally compare these experiences and differences in hopes of better understanding how context functions in long term relationships. I hope to be able to advise both the low and high context partner when and where to practice patience with one another since many factors not connected with personality may be impacting their marriage or long-term relationship. This thesis endeavors to map the gap between intention and expectation as well as action and perception to explain how a low/high context partner may interpret motives differently depending on his or her cultural upbringing.

Culture plays such an important role in everyday communication and in a person's life in general. It is well known that people from different countries do not communicate in the same ways. Cultures as Gudykunst (2004) states influence our communication and vice versa. (p. 44). Communication means not only being able to understand the language but there are other subtle things that are connected with people's cultural background that is different from our own. It is easy to misinterpret many things because of our stereotypes and different expectations if we do not understand the communication rules of others. We can see similar points in Gudykunst work (2004) citing Confucius "Human beings are drawn close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart" (p.3). Communication used to be easier in the past according to the anthropologist Hall (1976). In his book *Beyond Culture* Hall asserts in previous times, when the world was not so interconnected and so complex, understanding and communicating with each other was not so difficult. People knew each other they stayed home most of the time, had similar backgrounds and were aware of what to expect of each other. According to Hall our forefathers knew other individuals that were around well and were aware of its significance. All the behavior clues for them meant stability and predictability. Man's body is still the same nowadays but what has changed is the culture (all the communication systems with meanings such as words, postures, gestures, where the people work, play etc.) that can be only understood when people are familiar with the behavior. (p. 42) It is completely different today when the world is globalized and people from different cultures are in close contact. People have to often make big effort to try to understand each other. Not many people are willing to do that or know how to. People are alienated and misunderstandings and misinterpretations occur. To illustrate that even in seemingly very similar countries where the differences are not so obvious at the first look I can use an example of my ex- Canadian husband and his break up in an American-Canadian relationship that I mentioned at the start of the Introduction part.

Where the differences in communication and cultures can be observed even more obviously is when comparing countries from high context culture and low context culture such as the Czech Republic on one end and Canada and other English speaking countries on the other end. This thesis was written on the basis of such an experience, my fifteen year marriage with a Canadian husband. A person can only encounter different communication patterns after visiting another country or meeting someone from a different context country. It is well characterized by Hall (1976), when he states that “Understanding the reality of covert culture and accepting it on a gut level comes neither quickly nor easily, and it must be lived rather than read or reasoned” For no matter how well prepared one is intellectually for immersion in another culture, there is the inevitability of surprises” (p.58). Giving my own example and experience, there were many occasions that culture differences and differences in communication in high and low context culture played major role in many misunderstandings, misinterpretation and arguments in my Czech-Canadian marriage that one could not be prepared for enough.

As the above example shows, culture differences and different ways of communication can cause minor misunderstandings or even break relationships. On the other hand learning about different cultures does not have to be accompanied by negative experience, quite the opposite. It can be quite enriching. If we take bilingual families they have so much more to learn from and experience but all this positive face that culture differences and cross culture encounters may bring will not be the main focus of this thesis.

The thesis will describe the concept of culture, high and low context culture, CQ intelligence, my real life experience and experience of volunteers who shared their experience in a questionnaire. Theoretical part is included in chapter 1 and chapter 2 of the thesis, Chapter 1 will deal with concept of high and low context culture. E.T.Hall’s book *Beyond Culture* will be described and summarized in chapter 1. The term culture will be introduced from the anthropological point of view using the explanation of several different authors. To understand the high and low context differences a person will likely encounter can be helpful at any intercultural situations. The same can be found in learning about CQ intelligence as described in David Livermore’s *The Cultural Intelligence Difference*. Chapter 2 continues with defining the term of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) that can help in overcoming and avoiding misunderstandings that occur at cross-cultural encounters. CQ intelligence goes hand in hand with differentiation between high and low context cultures and helps to learn how to deal with cultural differences.

The practical part of the thesis is included in chapter 3 where I will describe my real life experiences, further based on the questionnaire used in research part anecdotal evidence of real situation or experiences with people born and raised in high context cultures being in a longer

term relationship or a marriage with someone from low context culture and vice versa will be presented and compared to my own experience. I will mention several differences between cultural rituals, values and customs I encountered based on my own experience. I will describe mostly what challenges, misunderstandings, surprises and possible wrong interpretations an everyday interaction in bilingual family can cause rather than what advantages and benefits it can bring to a person's life as undoubtedly there are many. The research part of this thesis will deal only with high and low context presenting experience and real situation examples of the Czech Republic as high context culture compared with cultures of low context culture such as Canada, Australia, England and the USA. 13 volunteers (one respondent from high context answered after consulting with her low context sister and mother-in-law and one low context respondent answered with consulting with his wife from high context) from a long term relationship from either low context or high context culture took part in the research. Their task was to describe a real life situation or experience of their own, which would show different communication styles in each context. These real life situations and experiences will be summarized and compared to my own experience. All these anecdotal evidence can serve as illustration of how to raise and improve CQ intelligence when encountered at intercultural situation, mainly in intercultural relationships and marriages.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Culture

This is a definition that links culture to communication, better put, making culture and communication equal. It is illustrated in Gudykunst, Professor of Speech Communication (2004) using E.T. Hall's citation "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (p.41). By that statement he claims that communication is influenced by the culture and the culture is influenced by the communication. Although there are many definitions of culture, only the ones that use rather anthropological and behavioral view of culture will be mentioned in this Chapter.

According to Hall (1976) culture has three characteristics. First that it is not innate and that people can learn it, second that some aspects of culture are interrelated and third that it is shared within a group and defines its boundaries. (p.16)

Gudykunst (2004) compares culture to a game or a play where different actors and actresses perform according to their own theories. They follow certain rules that they are familiar with and naturally absorbed and followed when they are encountered with strangers. Everyone does not know exactly what basic rules to follow but everyone naturally follows them. An example he mentions is if we were supposed to explain the rules of our culture to an alien we would not know exactly how because there are no exact rules. We are taught to be part of our culture and the norms and rules by our parents first (p. 42-43).

Nolan (1999) divides culture to three components, these are the knowledge we hold, the things we make and the things we do. According to Nolan cultural knowledge which is hidden inside people's heads is the most important one. The culture knowledge includes rules, categories, definitions and judgments and people use them to sort and interpret the world. For the people that have the same base together, these rules are logical and normal. (p.3)

Fisher, the Foreign Service Officer, academician and researcher (1988) in describing culture takes an example of a newborn child being born with a blank mind and everything including culture is to be filled in yet. He states that it is like a pretested design that is tested and created socially and is passed on to the child. Fisher, (p.45-46)

All the above authors agree on the fact that culture is learnt and their rules are shared within certain groups. According to Hall (1976) to be able to understand other individual cultures it is important to acknowledge the fact that there are unique forms of unconscious cultures and that every culture has their hidden and unique form (p.2). Hall goes on in explaining this fact

throughout his book *Beyond Culture*. Taking the definition of culture as being communication, not only language though is a means of communication as would be popularly held belief but:

What gives man his identity no matter where he is born - is his culture, the total communication framework: words, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, the way he handles time, space and materials and the way he works, plays, makes love and defends himself. All these things and more are complete communication systems with meanings that can be read correctly only if one is familiar with the behavior in its historical, social, and cultural context.(Hall, 1976, p.42)

Culture is man's medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized. (Hall, 1976, p.42)

Beyond Culture

There are many subjects and other dimensions in this book, besides high and low context culture concept that will be further explained, that are interrelated and which if understood can help the cross-cultural communication. Some of these other subjects and dimensions are problems of resources exhaustion or wrong setting of education. All these are driven by culture and people are often unable to recognize what impact culture has on their behavior and thinking. Even though the topics in the book might seem completely different they all relate to the same theme of the book, transcending culture by better understanding of our own culture and freeing oneself from the tie of unconscious culture. In the first chapters of the book Hall refers to this concept that he terms "extension transference"... "the common intellectual maneuver in which the extension is confused with or takes the place of the process extended"(p.28).Hall explains that people have evolved their extensions such as language, tools and institutions, often are alienated from each other and are not able to control what they have created. They have to repress human nature. If some of the extensions fail, people cannot fully use their potentials. He gives an example of culture and institutions making specialized solutions to specific problems. For example, during Industrial Revolution children in factories learnt that the whistle marked the end of the work. It was not necessary to bring a task to completion but instead they learnt that everything was measured with time. The children internalized it as it was presented to them as a

benefit not as a liability. He says that institutions not men and cultural systems determine our behavior in such a way that our lives are compartmentalized and we have learnt to think linearly not in a complex way and the cultural hidden tendency, structures form our lives like invisible “jet streams”. Today one of the first things children learn at schools (one of the extension transference) is that schedules rule everything and education in the West is fragmented. Schools are too big, the students get stranded and frustrated because their skills do not fit the system. Hall tends to look at how things function holistically. Man only in interactions with others learns about the structure of his own system. If Americans lived longer period in and Asian country and tried to apply the same extension transference that work in their own country they would learn nothing new. They can’t learn anything from this unless they go beyond their own culture. As he puts it culture has to be lived rather than reasoned. Sometimes the opinion that “they are just like folks back home” predominates but all depends on the context for a correct interpretation. Hall gives an example that can illustrate how everything is measured with time in our society, already mentioned in the part about the Industrial Revolution. This example describes how a case of American ambassadors who were often kept waiting for a long time, sometimes up to an hour before they were called in at the official visits in a small country of Far East. Like most western culture that function on chronological time, anything over a maximum twenty minute delay becomes an insult. The Americans were puzzled and felt it was disrespectful that they were kept waiting for so long. Only later they found out that the lack of relationship of the Far East country officials with the American ambassadors that out of the custom has to be built first in these kind of countries, played a major role in treating the Americans this way. Another form of communication mentioned in Hall’s book is “syncing” which means that every move of a human body is synchronized with words, syllables and blinking. “Syncing or “being in sync ”is when people in interactions either move together (in whole or in part) or they don’t and in failing to do so are disruptive to others around them. People move in a kind of dance (p. 71).Even this is a kind of communication and can lead to misunderstandings, where in some cultures blinking can be interpreted differently. As stated above the whole book comes to the main theme of transcending the own culture by better understanding our own culture. The main key concept in the process of transcending culture is identification. According to Hall identification is individual dynamism, unique of the person and as a manifestation of culture.

What was first introduced in this book was a concept of differentiating culture in two styles of communication pattern high and low context cultures, mentioned above at the beginning of the summary of *Beyond culture* book. Hall talks about being the context as of one function of

culture as selective screen between man and the outside world. What we accept and what we ignore is something that keeps the man from overloading. This is where dealing with context is important and helps with managing the overload. He says that context is in relation with meaning and that these two are inseparably tied together. In the process of contexting there are two processes, one inside which is in the brain and the other outside the organism. The process that is inside has either a function of past experience, innate contexting or both. The external process is a situation where the event occurs and it can either be environmental or situational contexting. It is important to look at the contexting process. The level of context determines the nature of the communication and is the base for the behavior. Internal contexting enables men the important function of automatic corrections.

There are other dimensions that are important in culture and are all related such as situational frames, action chains and are related to the main theme of high and low context cultures.

High and low context

Hall differentiates among cultures based on the role of context. He classifies culture patterns into high context culture and low context culture. In low context and high context culture there are differences not only in communication but also in formality level, level of commitment to relationship, space and territoriality. All these mentioned will be the theoretical basis serving for the research part of this thesis.

Communication:

High context communication is economical, fast, efficient and satisfying (Hall, 1976, p.101). It is where the majority of information is in the physical context or internalized in the person and not much is in explicit part of the message. There is a lot of syncing which makes people aware of things (p.53). People communicate more economically, like twins who have grown up together (p.91). Low context communication in contrast to high context communication is explicit, like two lawyers or two administrators putting together a regulation (p.91). When mentioning the action chains in Hall's book *Beyond Culture*, high context cultures have bigger commitment to action chains. High context cultures make a big difference between outsiders and insiders. Those who were raised here have higher expectations of others than in low context culture. People here expect to know the other to know what bothers them without being specific and rather talk around the point. The listener has to put it all together to make sense (Hall, 1976, p.113). To be able to understand and predict in the high context culture as an observer person you need to know the system well. If a person is not from a high context culture country he can get easily confused without knowing or recognizing it. People unfortunately follow the stereotypes of

their own culture strongly and they do not like to admit that there can be something different. (Hall, 1976, p.53)As Hall puts it:

In any encounter, particularly intercultural or interethnic, the correct reading of the other person's verbal and nonverbal behavior is basic to transactions at all levels. In fact, the correct reading of all sensory inputs and their integration into a coherent picture is one of the most important things we do. There are times when this is not easy, because behavioral systems are tied directly to the self-image system. It is therefore difficult for most of us to accept the reality of another's system, because it involves a different image and may require us to change our own. (p.83)

Even though Hall's book was written more than forty years ago, it is still very current as globalization has expanded the intercultural environment. There is bigger need for being able to understand certain ways of communication. Both Hall's *Beyond Culture* and David Livermore's more recent theory of CQ which builds upon the foundation of Hall, can help us avoid several misunderstandings and conflicts.

Relationships – differences in behavior

Gudykunst (2004) divides cultures to individualistic and collectivistic. When he talks about individualism-collectivism he means that we can observe culture differences in behavior but both exist simultaneously in every culture though one is always dominant. People from individualistic cultures tend to be self –centered and hedonistic while people from collectivistic cultures tend to feel more responsible for the caring for others. Individualism-collectivism explains how to understand cultural differences in behavior. On the other hand he states that high and low context explains differences in communication and mentions a connection between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and high and low context cultures. (p.44)He further explains high and low context cultures and the way these differ in communication. According to Gudykunst if a person is not raised in high context country then he is not able to understand the communication completely. High context communication is indirect and ambiguous, often secretive and implicit while low context communication is clear, precise and direct. He provides an example of expressions used by Americans such as “Say what you mean“, Don't beat around the bush “or “Get to the point “(p.57-59).

He mentions the misinterpretations that might be caused by not knowing which language to use when communicating with strangers. He gives an example of Japanese and Americans,

while in Japan people talk differently to someone who has a different social status or is of different country while Americans do not differentiate. He states that people from countries with low-context communication think that high-context communication doesn't work (p.173).

Similarly David Livermore mentions a few examples of the low context direct expressions that Americans himself included. As being a fan of, as he puts it, addressing the elephant in the room, in certain situations he would use expressions such as: "Don't dance around the issues" or "Shoot straight with me and tell me what you think". (Livermore, 2014)

Formality

Nollen (2000) provides more examples of possible misunderstandings this time between Czechs and Americans due to the cultural differences and these only support Hall's theory of differences between high and low cultures. Using the formal or informal speech at appropriate situations is necessary. Unlike Americans Czechs have to develop a relationship to a certain point then usually the informal tone can be used but the elders and superiors are addressed in the formal. Further he mentions and proves Hall's division of the implicit and silent high culture theory that Czechs unlike the Americans do not use the artificial space-fillers such as "How are you?" and do not use the small talk with anyone they meet. Another level of formality is shown with Czechs at using titles, even on business cards or door signs. Americans are used to addressing people by their first names but Czechs always address people at initial contact by the last name. Once they are well acquainted and both agree they address each other by the first name (p.77).

Space

Nollen (2000) states that when a stranger moves in a new apartment in the Czech Republic it is normal that Czechs do not welcome you and are not friendly at first. They keep their distance, are impersonal and it is hard to get close to them.(p.35)

Livermore (2013) groups countries in ten different culture clusters. People in these clusters have similarities because of their geography, religion or culture values (p.7).Livermore mentions at each cluster connection with division of Hall's high and low context or Gudykunst's individualism or collectivism. Gudykunst mentions culture value dimensions and key differences that help us understand the cluster. When examining the Anglo cluster (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K.,U.S., etc) Livermore points out the Individualism and its importance of individual goals, rights and freedom with the extreme emphasis on free speech .This also explains their strong attitude towards their personal space. Anglo nations are competitive rather than cooperative with the emphasis on assertive behavior, work and achievement. (p. 21-23)

When pointing out the culture value dimensions of the Eastern Europe cluster (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Poland, Russia, Serbia etc.) this cluster is more collectivistic than individualist with the emphasis on prioritizing personal relationships before individual goals and communal sense of looking out for each other. Livermore (2015) states that being able to comprehend cultural differences and similarities and to avoid possible misunderstandings it is good to gain CQ-cultural intelligence. The concept of CQ-intelligence will be described in the following chapter.

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE -CQ

E. T. Hall's statement that unlike in the past when communication was easy, it is almost inevitable to be encountered with someone from a different culture and find oneself in a cross-cultural situation because of the globalized world today. What has to be mentioned is the fact that all the books used in the thesis were published eight years and more ago and since then with smartphone technology the world has become even more globalized and connected. Cross-cultural situations can cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations for almost anyone. The main goal of the thesis is to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations in communication between partners from a different context culture. It is good if people were aware and gain what Livermore calls Cultural intelligence or CQ. It is necessary to explain what CQ means and start with Livermore's book titled *Cultural Intelligence Difference* (2011)

CQ or cultural intelligence is the capability to function effectively in a variety of cultural contexts—including national, ethnic, organizational, and generational. It's a whole new way of approaching the age-old topics of cultural sensitivity, racism, and cross-border effectiveness. And it will open up a whole new world of possibilities for you. (p.14)

Livermore (2011) further explains that CQ emphasis is not only to be able to understand other cultures but also to solve problems and adapt to different situations. The way you approach the CQ depends on if it can concern you personally or only your awareness about differences. (p.22)CQ can help us in navigating in today's globalized world. It transcends features such as learning a new language or cultural values, it prepares us for multicultural situations. It is necessary to see the new world differently and to have the will to move beyond our differences to respect all the human beings and from this we can learn. (p.187)

However long before the concept of Cultural intelligence became a formalized concept the movement called People to People already stood up for the values of cultural understanding and engagement. It started in 1956 by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower but shortly after he became a president he promoted the idea of "Peace through Understanding". (People to People) He wanted to spread cultural understanding and world peace by direct interaction between regular citizens in the world. For more than fifty years this organization has been a leader in focusing mainly on using education travel to improve cultural intelligence and social consciousness among children and young people. When People to People send individuals to foreign countries, they know it doesn't mean they automatically improve their CQ but they are assessed and trained

before in cultural intelligence (Livermore 2010, p.181-183). Today there are three pillars: humanitarian work, cultural exchange and global education. (People to People)

Aside from the movement People to People the term cultural CQ is relatively recent. The first definition of the concept was given by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang and later more was furthered developed and popularized by David Livermore as related to cross-cultural competence. She/He interacts with others from different cultural regions” and has behavioral, motivational, and metacognitive aspects. There are some important differences between Cultural Intelligence and other intercultural approaches (p.19) that Livermore (2010) mentions. One of the differences is that CQ is measured and tested in many samples, times and CQ is connected to motivational, cognitive, meta-cognitive and behavioral aspects of intelligence. According to Livermore’s webpage ...“primary research was conducted across 72 countries and used by leading global companies and academic institutions such as BMW, Coca-Cola, Google, NTT, Novartis, Harvard Business School, London School of Economics, Stanford University and hundreds more and more than 50,000 individuals from over 90 countries have taken the CQ Assessment”. It is more than cultural understanding and it puts emphasis on learned capabilities rather than on personality traits. (p.20)

Two terms are used in this thesis cross-cultural and intercultural but Livermore (2010) clarifies, the terms *intercultural* and *cross-cultural* which are used synonymously. Despite the fact that these terms are different technically (*cross-cultural* referring to “two cultures interacting” and *intercultural* referring to “several cultures interacting”) Livermore uses the more familiar term *cross-cultural* in his books. (p.14)

Where you can use the CQ:

Although the main area where the CQ is used is in big global companies where it can make multicultural teams more effective it can improve effectiveness for culturally diverse situations in general.(Livermore blog) Livermore (2011) explains that it can be used to have better relationship with your colleagues, neighbors or classmates. (p.23) Parents can start teaching their children to be ready for cultural diverse situations by talking to them from young age about cultural differences or friends or school mates that can often be from a different culture.(Livermore blog)

To illustrate the point that CQ intelligence is important in everyday life and not only in a leadership of a global company there is a good example from Livermore’s blog concerning behaviors that he has encountered cross-culturally that seemed “rude”:

- Asking questions that are too personal (Chinese)
- Not starting an email with a friendly greeting (Argentina)
- Looking a superior in the eye (Nigerian)
- Not looking me in the eye (Canadian)
- Using my first name in an introductory email (Slovakian)
- Wasting time on a business call with small talk (German)
- Returning to China and being told, “Wow, you’ve become fat!” (Austrian)
- Not responding to an email (British)
- Asking why I haven’t responded to an email (Emirati)
- Asking how much I paid for my car. (American)
- Spitting on the street (Hong Konger)
- People cutting in line (Australian)
- Standing far apart while talking (Brazilian)

All the above examples prove that among the diverse groups more misunderstandings and misinterpretations can occur than in groups of the same culture. Here are some suggestions for culturally intelligent responses to strange cross-cultural encounters that Livermore mentions in his blog and these are in fact the four CQ capabilities that will be further explained: (Livermore blog)

1. Begin with positive intent. It is not always the case that someone tries to be rude or inconsiderate so a person should start with assuming the best. Even in the end a person finds out someone is being rude, people shouldn’t be too fast to make a judgment and that to the other person our behavior may seem inappropriate too.

2. Seek additional information. We should first ask additional information to explain “why” someone acts the way they do. People might find other’s behavior offensive only for example people don’t line up in a queue the way it is standard in a person’s culture.

3. Decide in advance how to address the situation. It is good to look at some of the frustrating situations we most likely encounter and try to find effective ways to respond.

4. Be yourself but adapt just enough. We should try to stay “authentic”, but not overdo it. We should do the same during intercultural encounters and be aware of the fact of what behavior will best communicate our intentions.

CQ’s four capabilities:

1. CQ Drive (motivation)

According to Livermore (2011) it is the degree to which a person is ready for the culturally diverse situations and is willing to be persistent in this approach and this is not applicable only in a leadership. It starts from the interest in a different culture and confidence to relate effectively in that culture but the very core is to love people and a desire to get to know them and the world around them better. The person has to believe in his abilities and be aware of what rewards it might bring from functioning effectively in culturally diverse situations. Low CQ can make you look ignorant, clueless, and self – centered. On the other hand people with high CQ get tired more quickly by working and relating in cross cultural situations than when we do so in familiar contexts. With high CQ drive a person might get frustrated when tries to talk about cross-cultural experience, interests or new restaurants and other people are not interested. (p.43 - 45) You can connect better the cross-cultural experience, more countries you have lived for more than a year better, with cultural intelligence. Even though it gives children a great opportunity to start learning about the world early, Livermore states that such an experience does not play a big role in developing CQ intelligence because children only accompany their parents and do not make any decisions. However later when young adults decide to travel for work and interaction this kind of cross-cultural travel leads to higher CQ intelligence. At the same time only by itself experience in cross-culture situations does not ensure cultural intelligence but when together with traveling it is combined with cultural intelligence capabilities and priorities, it enhances the CQ Drive- our confidence foremost. (p.64)At the last part of this chapter I describe my experience with living in two different countries as an adolescent. I assume that to me this was a good start of enhancing my CQ Drive since I combined the experience, traveling and was encountered in different cultural situations.

2. CQ Knowledge (cognition)

Livermore (2010) describes this as the way you understand the role of culture in how people think and behave and the way you are familiar with how cultures are similar and different.(p.69)The best way to learn about different culture is when a person is in it and tries to learn about everything and everybody. Livermore (2010) gives some practical advice on how to enhance the CQ knowledge that beside the leadership can be useful in cross cultural situations. People should learn a foreign language, read international books and watch different kinds of news or go to the grocery store of a different ethnic community.(p.110) Brooks Peterson (2004) suggests that even with a little knowledge of language people should observe the nonverbal signs and notice how close people stand, if they touch each other when they talk, pay attention to eye contact and postures. Not understanding these nonverbal communication signals can lead to make

a bad impression or to many misinterpretations. (p. 209) Strategy that is very important for better CQ knowledge is to understand the cultural values, about what is good, right and fair. These dimensions of cultural values are most often used to describe national cultures. These can give us an idea why someone approaches appropriate situation. The most important cultural values that people should understand but not necessarily should we stereotype the whole culture according to them are:

Individualism - Collectivism

The extent to which personal identity is defined in terms of individual or group characteristics.

Power Distance

The extent to which differences in power and status are expected and accepted.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The extent to which risk is reduced or avoided through planning and guidelines.

Cooperativeness—Competitiveness

The extent to which achievement and competition are valued in contrast with a priority on social relationships and emotions.

Time Orientation

The extent to which there's a willingness to await Access

Context

The extent to which communication is direct and emphasizes roles and implicit understanding.

Doing - Being

The extent to which action and results are emphasized and valued. (Livermore, 2011, p.89-93)

3. CQ Strategy (meta-cognition)

Once a person is motivated and knows some basics about how cultures differ then his CQ drive and knowledge there is still something missing to gain or improve CQ intelligence. The next step, what connects CQ Drive and CQ Knowledge, is CQ Strategy (Livermore 2010,p.107). According to Livermore (2010) it is the level where you know what's going on in a cross-cultural situation and you are able to use that awareness to manage those situations well. There are many subtle things that have to be understood that even if you are an expert on cross-cultural things you can still fail. It is only one fragment to understand how to approach certain situation differently in other cultures but the other fragment is to be able to behave this way. It is in other words called "thinking about thinking" because a person has to stand back and observe and analyze the emotions and thoughts. When CQ Strategy is on a high level you are able to behave better in

various cultural situations when you are encountered in one and not only assume before. People who have introvert personalities or use their intuition tend to have high CQ Strategy. Basically people should not rush into making judgment but rather see for themselves first and think. The other thing to gain better CQ intelligence is to stay focused, something that Livermore compares to mindfulness “complete awareness of everything, that happens within your body, mind, and consciousness“. When encountered in cross-cultural situation, it can help us beyond our normal thinking and behavior and become more focused and mindful. (p.110 - 120)The best practice that Livermore (2010) mentions and is not only applicable in a leadership is to ask a question why five times, keep a journal of observation/interpretation exercise or examine cross-cultural situations in what you see and hear (p.130)

4. CQ Action (behavior)

Livermore (2010) explains that this is the level to which you can act appropriately in a culturally diverse situation. You should be flexible in verbal and nonverbal behaviors and adapt to different cultural norms. After we acquire the knowledge of motivation, understanding, and strategy we can move to CQ Action to be able to engage in our multicultural work and relationships. All four CQ capabilities are important but people usually judge us according to CQ Action. CQ Action is mostly about behavior but also social etiquette to adapt to a certain context. (p.144) Individuals with extremely high CQ Action do not even think about adopting their behavior, they do it naturally with intuition although there are still some cultural situations that there is no other way but adapt their behavior. The way to improve CQ Action is to demonstrate interest in a different culture, no need trying to be an expert, try to imitate behaviors, try to avoid taboos, learn basic words and phrases in a different language, notice different kind of vocalization. When interacting with someone from a different culture we should use appropriate rate of speech and slow down.(p. 149-159) The best practice that Livermore (2010) gives and is also applicable not only in a leadership for CQ Action is learning what taboos are most important for the certain region. (p.141)

Motivation, cognition, meta-cognition and behavior all these are closely interrelated and depend on each other because a person who knows how to behave in interpersonal relationships but is not motivated and cannot function in socially intelligent way. A person who knows a lot about a practical situation deeply but cannot function in certain situations in real life does not have is missing practical intelligence. (Livermore, 2011, p.29) CQ is developing continuously, while the four capabilities do not have to develop in only one order, they are like steps to gain CQ

intelligence. CQ intelligence gives us a new perspective on our lives, with some familiar features, learning about cultural values or learning a new language. CQ is further and it goes beyond these features and helps us to be prepared for different multicultural changes. It teaches us to respect, defer, and learn from the values of others. Big strength of CQ intelligence is in applying it into our lives, relationships and work in today's globalized world. (Livermore, 2010, p.170-187)

All the above descriptions, definitions and directions about CQ intelligence can definitely serve well for better understanding of some of the behavior being in intercultural marriage or relationship. On the other hand living with someone from different culture means that it concerns everyday life unlike meeting someone from a different culture occasionally or at work only. Two people in a relationship usually get to know each other with time well enough that they are ready for the differences and for the sake of being able to function together they have to be more tolerant as we can see in CQ drive Livermore's description people get tired more quickly by relating in cross cultural situations. What has to be taken in account here when talking about CQ intelligence is that living with someone from a different context culture doesn't mean that everything about the person has to be connected to the culture. Some of the differences can be on a personal level and therefore it is necessary to watch others from that same culture or be in the other culture environment. According to *Cultural Intelligence Centre* there are no differences in CQ scores based on where the person is from. Whether people have low, moderate, and high scores in the world depends on people's approach these opportunities, to what extent they are willing to engage with people from different cultures and how they react to such experience. (Cultural Intelligence Centre)

From my own experience, if a person starts a relationship with someone from a different culture, in my case low context culture, it automatically takes a certain part of CQ drive. If there was no CQ drive, the relationship might not last long. I had had a certain level of CQ drive even before I met my ex husband. I can illustrate that on a few examples. I have always been interested in studying different languages, exploring different cultures, food and customs. Even though I am an introvert person and usually not the first one starting discussion or the one who wants to be a centre of attention, I am a very curious, forthcoming and a broadminded. When I travel I like to watch people, listen and simply feel the different customs and the life flow. I like to question myself why these people react the way they do or behave the way they do. I might not be the average or typical traveler always looking for the historical sights and the most and best photographs to show around after returning home. I like to feel the atmosphere, people and

everyday rush of a new place. I might not remember all the dates of the buildings, directions or distances covered but I remember what it feels, smells or what emotions I experience and the new situation or a place brings me. One of the best parts is when you travel to get up early in the morning, go for a run in a town you are visiting and just watch the way everything is waking up or sit at a local café and feel the atmosphere of the place and look around. I absolutely love trying new food, restaurants ingredients and new tastes and I am never one of these who cannot wait to go back home to have their usual meal. One of the things I really liked about big Canadian cities was all that diversity of different cuisines.

Going back to the relationships, most likely with time a person in this long term relationship takes on some CQ knowledge, but still has to learn a lot to be able to read the nonverbal signs and certain communication signals that are different. I have been in situations like these aside and before meeting my husband, where I had to face culture differences and a culture shock myself. I know what a person has to go through and overcome even only at dealing with everyday life situations. It is certainly helpful to read books about Anglo culture but even after this when you think you are ready for all the possible culture differences ,all this cannot be totally eliminated and there are always things that surprise you or what more even shock you. Good grasp of culture differences or similarities is the key but that is not anything a person can learn anyway. The only way to really learn and find out is to be kind of ready and observe. You can read about things like an act of silence can be interpreted differently in Anglo cluster or that being ten minutes late can be still acceptable in some cultures but in other cultures it is not. Most of the subtle and little things are to be found out in everyday interaction with other cultures. Quite an important thing is not being prejudice and accept that there are different customs, traditions and level of politeness etc. It is hard though and without notion of high and low context culture differences a person gets in the same arguments and misunderstandings .In my case I knew there were some differences but I didn't know about the concept of high and low context and CQ intelligence and many situations and communication misunderstanding I related to my ex husband's personality. If I knew that I may have got to the extent what Livermore calls CQ Strategy and CQ Action and may have been more flexible in verbal and nonverbal behaviors and adapt better to them.

REAL LIFE EXPERIENCE

In the last chapter I showed how CQ intelligence is important in everyday situations, how important it is to observe and watch subtle things in people's behavior. This chapter includes mostly real life experience of my own that I observed and comparison of these to the experiences of the volunteers who answered the questionnaire and shared their experience. They all have an experience of a longer term relationship with someone from an opposite context culture with most of them living in an opposite context culture country. Even if like myself some of these people did not live in a low context country but in the Czech Republic with their low context partner/husband, their experience is only partly limited. Living with the partner for many years and being in contact with his/her family and friends provides various observations of differences in everyday life. The following statement would be applicable in both cases for myself as well as for some of the volunteers that have not moved to a different context country but lived with someone from a different context.

When people move to a new culture they take with them the taken-for-granted meaning structure of their home culture. They continue to choose actions consistent with it, and to interpret their own and their host's actions in terms of it. Conflicts related to the differences in rules, meanings, and values between the two cultures will be inevitable. (Michael Kim Zapf)

If we were talking about a long term relationship or a marriage of the same culture in that case the following statement from Sullivan's article, *"When Cultures Collide: Low-Context, Versus High-Context,"* would be understandable. There is a tendency for a couple married for a long time to communicate on a high-context level. For instance nonverbal cues and silence have more meaning to such a husband and wife than to an outsider. Any interconnected group that has similar values, experiences and expectations is a high context culture where the members don't need as many words and explanations as a low-context culture.(Sullivan , 2011).The only thing is that this would not always be applicable in cross culture marriages. Waldman and Rublacava, in Tili.T.R and Barker G. in Taylor and Francis Online argue that people often don't realize what impact culture has on their feelings, thoughts and actions. The result is that they overestimate the ability to interpret their partner's behavior and actions objectively and accurately.(Tili and Barker ,2005). Similar example is one from Michala Škrábová, a psychologist writing her dissertation on the topic of intercultural communication. When she was interviewed about her cross-cultural relationship on Radio Praha in English she said:

“I think at the beginning, it’s usually more positive, especially for people who like new things, getting to know something new to them. But when we go deeper into the relationship, communication becomes really important and can become more problematic. Because you never understand the small nuances, the humor and the way your partner behaves fully.”

This above statement reminds me of the anecdote where I described my Canadian ex-husband’s experience with an American girlfriend and their breakup because she said they were so culturally different. This chapter involves the scale of differences as described by Brooks Peterson (2004). Again one would assume that Canada and the USA are not too different at the first look, but Peterson says that when Americans go to Canada “they don’t come back from a trip to Canada saying, ‘Oh my god! Canada totally blew my mind! The people, the life, everything is so different there!’” (p.76)

His point is that there is a scale of differences and some countries are lower and some higher on the scale compared to our country (p.77). When talking about differences in high and low context cultures some are lower and higher on the scale, too. The Czech Republic might be on a different scale in terms of high context cultures and the same would be applicable for Canada, the USA, Great Britain and Australia. All the countries and their volunteers whose experiences have been used in the thesis (in the appendix 2)are from the context point of view not on the opposite sides of the scale, but are somewhere in the middle. Since this thesis arose from my own experience from living with a person from a low context culture I will list some of my own experience below. I can say these are not all of them here, there would be more but I will try to mention the most obvious ones and to be honest the ones I remember. I divided them to categories such a Communication, Space, Relationship and Formality follow on the chapter 1 where these four categories of differences are mentioned.

1) Communication:

EXAMPLE 1:

When my ex- Canadian husband came back from work and I didn’t make anything for dinner (which was rare), he would have been angry that the dinner was not ready and I had not let him known ahead. He started telling me that I should have at least let him know, should have told him ahead.

My interpretation: I assumed he could have grabbed something from what there was at home and it did not have to be said explicitly. I didn't think it was necessary to make him aware ahead of time as there was plenty of food available.

His possible interpretation: He thought I was not responsible did not care to communicate basic information.

EXAMPLE 2:

When he talked to me about something and my reaction was silence he immediately thought I was angry that I didn't respond at least with some kind of words. My mother-in-law thought I didn't like her because she thought I was too quiet or appeared non responsive.

My interpretation: I thought my husband was too pushy and did not give me enough time to think about what he was asking.

His possible interpretation: He thought I was being rude by ignoring him or pretending not hear him. He said that just a grunt would have been enough. Something like "hm" that we use in Czech was not enough though.

This kind of different perception of silence and more vocalization in low context country is described in Livermore's (2010) *Intelligence Difference*. Livermore describes a situation of an American boss from a low context country and his employee from a high context country:

"Sana (high context) doesn't have to use all kinds of vocalizations ("uh-huh," "sure" "yeah") if that's uncomfortable for her. But she should understand that many U.S. professionals lean upon these kinds of cues to demonstrate understanding, so some way of offering feedback would enhance her communication with Robert (low context)." (p.165)

Another similar example from Radio Praha in English an interview of a Czech guy (Tomáš), married to an American woman (Bethany) can be added to high and low context communication differences:

One thing that is great about being with Bethany, or about being in an intercultural relationship, is that we are aware of the differences. Bethany knows that she talks more than I am used to. And I was talking with a friend about how that is, when our girlfriends talk too much and we are not that interested. And I told him that sometimes I just say to Bethany 'Sorry, I wasn't listening to you' and she usually says 'That's probably for the better.' And doesn't get offended. And my friend was completely perplexed about that, because he would never dare to say anything like that.

EXAMPLE 3:

Once my ex-Canadian husband helped his Czech friend's wife to get a well-paid job through another friend of his in a Czech company. The wife thanked him and seemed really happy she got that job. My ex-husband was disappointed and kept going on for a long time about how they didn't appreciate his help that they didn't say anything else.

My interpretation: For those people one thank you was probably enough and did not have to go over and over again about how much they appreciate his help.

His possible interpretation: For him it meant they should have said it many times over and over again. They should have appreciated it more, taken us for dinner to reciprocate.

EXAMPLE 4:

I was told by my ex that he loved me almost every day and he said the same to our children. I didn't say it as much even though I felt that way and when we had many arguments over this. My parents rarely told me when I was a child and I knew they loved me from the way they treated me and I rarely told them. Even though I tried to learn it from my ex husband and say it to him and to our children more I felt it was unnatural.

My interpretation: I tried to explain to him that I thought I showed it enough and I thought he knew from my behavior and the way I treated our family.

His possible interpretation: I did not express that I loved him and the children enough because otherwise I would have said it more, write cards or notes every day, when I left the house or went to bed. Here is another example similar to my own experience EXAMPLE4 from a Czech guy married to an American woman, interviewed on Radio Praha in English: "In American movies, people say 'I love you' all the time, and the Czech translation is: 'Mám tě rád,' I like you. So even from this, you can see that we are less straightforward, we keep our feelings more to ourselves."

EXAMPLE 5:

My ex-husband and so did his family used to write cards on every possible occasion, birthdays, anniversary, Valentine's Day, wedding anniversary etc. He could not imagine not writing something on such occasions. This to me is another sign of explicitness.

EXAMPLE 6:

My ex-husband and his family when they came here for a visit never rode "black" on a public transport with a pass or a ticket. Once his house keys were stolen, he told the landlord that he would cover all the change of the lock and the keys for other people from the house. Here it would not be such a case, people often ride subways without a ticket and would rather not tell anybody about the keys lost. It might have something to do with the straightforwardness,

directness of low context cultures. People tend to be honest compared to the high context where people would rather not say anything or kind of lie and get by somehow.

Summary and comparison to the volunteers' responses: Same as me most of the people who answered the questionnaire agreed that people from low context culture countries tend to speak more, use more words when they want to say 100 words, they verbalize 150 words. They mentioned that their partners are more vocal, they like to talk things over and. One participant wrote that the low context country partner's "talk" is more like a speech. One of the volunteers mentioned that those fifty words extra the low context would use may be expressions like "Do you know what I mean?". Similar answer is that a low context partner of one high context respondent uses long sentences and she feels like.... *"Just say it please. Stop beating around the bush. Don't give me long exhausting sentences, just say it"*. A good example is one response when the volunteer stated: "I have observed that some individuals would answer a direct yes/no question with a rather lengthy response that would elicit advantages/disadvantages, possible consequences of possible yes/no answer and why each of the consequences would be ok/not ok without giving a clear indication of leaning towards either yes or no. In other words, the individual would not explicitly say "yes" or "no" or "I don't know" however would engage in elaborating about the a wide landscape of possible and often hypothetical consequences.

On the other hand only half of the volunteers think that people from low context culture country are direct. They state that English is looser and imprecise and that there is always a small talk used in English speaking countries, that everything is kind of sugarcoated and people kind of beat around the bush. Some volunteers who agreed answered with examples of people from low context using more short questions and immediate short reactions or that the sign of being direct and specifics would be in categorizing the events into black and white, yes/no. Two respondents both commenting on the UK do not think that people there are direct. When comparing and summarizing the volunteers' responses connected with the misinterpretation of silence, some of the volunteers agree that they have experienced themselves that silence can be understood as not paying attention to the person or ignoring the person and that in the low context cultures the silence have to be filled in.

2) Space:

EXAMPLE 1:

My ex-husband was quite irritated when being shoved or pushed by the people on the public transport in Prague. He thought people were rude and stood too close to him here at the public places without apologizing.

EXAMPLE 2:

He couldn't get used to people living so close to each other, without any private space. He often commented on when the neighbors' dog started barking and nobody complained that apparently it would be totally different in Canada where they would not let somebody else disturb them and they would take the legal actions immediately.

He didn't like to go to my parents cottage and share a small space with my relatives and listened to the neighbors singing and making noise to the late night hours. Similarly I noticed (and it is also connected with individualistic cultures) that he didn't like to travel in groups or with travel agencies neither did his friends or a family. Unlike in the Czech Republic people are used to travel in groups, do organized trips with families or groups of friends.

EXAMPLE 3:

He did not like being touched or kissed when it was his birthday a handshake would have been enough. Even though the birthdays had to be celebrated on the birthday day exactly, there would not be all this ceremony to it like Czechs do, shake hands and say what you wish to the person, give him/her a present and a kiss.

EXAMPLE 4:

He found really offensive that Czech people sometimes run around their places or cottages ("half naked" as he put it) being dressed quite scantily. He was shocked that when we came to someone's place for a visit you would often find people who were dressed quite scantily and were not bothered by the fact that there were visitors. Children not babies anymore would not wear any clothing when at public pools. In general demands on his personal space were extremely annoying. This included people who did not use enough deodorant and the smell of public places was sometimes unbearable for him and said this would not be encountered in Canada.

EXAMPLE 5:

This example might be also connected with the way things are communicated here in the Czech Republic. My ex-husband was always frustrated that there were no road and direction signs. Especially before people started using GPS, the only thing person had to rely on road signs. We drove for a while until we got to any direction sign. Here people kind of use their intuition unlike

in Canada everything has to be explicit with many signs and everything has to be clear, there are more traffic lights too.

Summary and comparison to the volunteers' responses: Volunteers mostly agreed on this point, where low context culture emphasizes personal space, privacy, are more protective and individualistic. One example was of going camping in Canada is not as easy as in the Czech Republic, most of the Canadian camps are private. The other one was an example from an American supermarket where Americans like to keep their space and distance. The other volunteer gives an example when people go to the beach in the UK they like to keep their distance and do not sit close to anyone, it would be considered rude.

3) Relationship:

EXAMPLE 1:

My ex-husband could start talking to anybody, anywhere about anything. He immediately made friends and was not hesitant to invite them to our place for dinner. If there was someone new he met on the bus, at the gym he got to know his first name and it wasn't rare when he invited him to have dinner with us. Even when he flew back from Canada here he met some Jewish guy on the plane, total stranger to him, talked to him the whole flight and invited him to stay at our place over night and the whole next day.

EXAMPLE 2:

The above described in EXAMPLE 1 also meant that all these people he met and started talking to so easily all these people came and went. A lot of them never really became his friends. We have moved several times and he always started talking to people at the bar, supermarket or just neighbors and made friends with them but as soon as we moved he often never saw those people again.

Summary and comparison to the volunteers' responses: Most of the volunteers agree that the relationship in low context culture begin quickly compared to the Czech Republic where building a relationship takes a longer time. They mentioned examples of low context country such as talking to people easier and start relationship easier at the supermarket or a bar. The relationship seem more shallow and a low-context person may become friends with someone over a party whereas in the Czech Republic it might take several parties participating in several other activities together to build a friendship. Unlike the Czech Republic where building a relationship takes relatively long time, requires many shared experiences in variety of circumstances.

However some volunteers commented on the fact that once you build strong relationship and friendship it lasts a lifetime no matter what cultural context country you are from.

4) Formality:

EXAMPLE 1:

My ex-Canadian husband spoke Czech quite well but he still had a problem with using “tykání” “vykání”. He used “tykání” mostly, the way he was used to in his language and him addressing people by their first name, sometimes shocked Czech people but mostly they became friendly with him, whereas if it were two Czechs there would be bigger distance. He started calling my parents by their first names shortly after he met them, which in Czech conditions would not be considered as proper.

EXAMPLE 2:

He could talk to people he worked for, CEO of the banks and big companies about a lot of personal things that I would not unless I made friends with these people. He was so friendly with them, joked around with them not too different than if they were his friends.

EXAMPLE 3:

I noticed, when comparing Czech and Canadian Christmas that Czech Christmas is more traditional, I always insisted on having the typical Czech Christmas dinner and the turkey as a Canadian dinner for the 25th , but my ex husband did not worry too much about what kind of dinner we would have. Even though the typical Czech Christmas dinner is not anything healthy or special I carried the traditions from my childhood and made sure they were followed every year. It is similar with other traditions here such as Easter and “Čerti” on “Mikuláš”. Strangely even a lot of people in this country now think that using a willow whip “pomlázka” to hit girls is not right or nor is it healthy to scare little children that if they don’t behave they would be taken to hell, and yet but they want to maintain such traditions anyway.

Comparison to the volunteers’ responses: Most of the volunteers agreed on the fact that the Czechs are more formal, especially on the obvious sign such as “tykání” “vykání” part. One example of less formality was that people in low context country dress more casually even when going to the theater or a nice dinner. There were two responses from the UK environment that differ. Whereas the Czech respondent would agree that the English are less formal and giving the example of being in the supermarket and the cashier would call her “love” and quizzed her to details what she was doing that day and where she was from. She didn’t feel comfortable and thought it was a bit too much for her. The other respondent UK native disagrees and thinks that

that in the UK there is a higher level of formality and such can be seen at golf clubs and the Queen and thinks that people from the UK who have decided to stay in the Czech Republic do not want to follow the rules in the UK. This might be due to the fact that UK is more towards the high context culture country compared to Australia or US.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was aimed to high and low context cultures mostly differences in communication nevertheless included concepts connected with high and low context such as space, formality and relationship. Since high and low context was first introduced by E.T.Hall in his book *Beyond Culture*, the book was summarized in the first chapter of the thesis, followed with the theory of Culture and Communication based on available literature. In chapter 2 Cultural Intelligence was explained as well and its importance not in a business sphere only but in terms of everyday life as in the exploration cross-cultural relationships and marriages. In this thesis in chapter 3, my real life situation examples were used and described and compared to research part where a set of real life examples of people living with someone from the opposite context culture was collected and compared to my own experience as well as to the theory.

In general, people agreed on the fact that communication, space, formality and relationship in low and high context cultures differ as Hall and Livermore predicted. Some of the volunteers mentioned several times that the differences depend on the person and its personality no matter what context they are from, and yet most of their answers were uniform about their partner's behaviors and preferences as from the UK respondent. Again, this may be due to the fact that UK is close to the high context culture in many of its assumptions. As mentioned in previous chapters no culture is only high or low context, they show qualities of both and are on the scale of closer to the high or low context. With the fact that the world is shrinking and becoming more globalized, the concept of high and low culture will continue to evolve in the future.

This is what I would suggest based on my own experience and experience of the respondents who shared their experience from living with a partner from opposite context culture. Both of the partners high and low context need to be more patient, listen more carefully and should not jump to conclusions. High context people need to verbalize their feeling to their partner and acknowledge the partner when he/she talks even if they find that awkward or embarrassing, as well as do a better job of translating the silence of the high context culture when the low context partner is confused. High context people should not think the low context partner does not try to be insensitive or rude when he/she is direct and says things the way they really are. On the other hand, low context partner needs to understand that simply when I say I don't love you doesn't mean I don't love you or if I don't write a birthday card it doesn't mean I don't care. Low context partner needs to realize that when there is no immediate answer, the high context partner is not ignoring them. Low context partner ought to learn to give the high context partner more time for an answer.

Furthermore thanks to this thesis and reading about this topic not only did I learn about high and low context cultures/CQ intelligence but also about root of the misunderstandings and miscommunications I had in my cross-cultural marriage. I have found explanations that serve to inform me on a different level. Writing this thesis has raised for me several questions around the concept of high and low context and CQ. Even though this thesis was not aimed at what advantages this kind of relationship may have or how enriching it may be while examining this concept it made me think of an old Czech saying “Kolik jazyků umíš tolikrát jsi člověkem” the closest translation would be “The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are human” and interpreted it on a different level. Not only that learning a new language gives you new opportunities but it opens a door to new cultures and it moves you to a different dimension in terms of getting to know a new culture, observing cultural differences and gaining CQ. Learning about this topic and examining all the books has increased my curiosity of what kind of communication whether high or low or one will prevail with children born and raised in bilingual families, some of them even living in a different country than their parents native ones. That would in fact concern my two bilingual children and be an interesting topic to find out and explore one day.

My personal conclusion from this thesis is as mentioned in chapter 3 that there are still small nuances and the way partners behave cannot be understood fully but having known about high and low context culture and CQ intelligence concept some time ago while being married some of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations might have been avoided or at least would have been approached differently with time. Let this experience serve as example for other cross culture relationships to learn from, gain better cultural intelligence and avoid some of the possible conflicts.

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SUMMARY IN CZECH

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je rozdílná komunikace a kultura podle rozdělení kultur na high context a low context.

Práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních kapitol. První kapitola s názvem Kultura a komunikace vysvětluje koncept kultury, high a low context a shrnuje knihu E.T.Halla Beyond Culture. Druhá kapitola s názvem CQ Intelligence popisuje koncept kulturní inteligence jako úzce spjatý s high a low context kulturou. Kapitola třetí se nazývá Zkušenosti ze života a zahrnuje moje vlastní příklady, zkušenosti a srovnání se zkušenostmi lidí, žijící v dlouhodobém vztahu s partnerem z opačné kultury (low context země jako Austrálie, Kanada, Anglie a USA), buď s místem pobytu v České republice, nebo v některé z výše uvedených zemích. Tyto zkušenosti budou sloužit jako návod pro ty, kteří se ocitnou v multikulturní situaci na multikulturní úrovni a jako návod k posílení kulturní inteligence. Hlavním cílem bakalářské práce je odkrýt co je pod viditelnou kulturou, použít teoretické podklady, moje osobní zkušenosti, dotazník se zkušenostmi ostatních. Na závěr porovnat tyto zkušenosti a zjistit do jaké míry se liší nebo shodují s mými.

APPENDIX 1

Volunteers' real life experience

Low context culture: Canada, Australia, USA, England

High context culture: the Czech Republic

https://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/pub/context_cultures_high_and_lo.htm

Can you think of an example or situation that you found differences in culture or any misunderstandings or misinterpretations it has caused you living with someone from a different context culture and describe below each question?

Implicit / explicit communication

- 1) Living with a person from a low context country often means that when they want to say 100 words they verbalize 150 words unlike someone from high context culture wants to say 150 words but verbalizes 100 words?
- 2) The communication in low context culture is very direct and specific unlike in high context culture where it is full of reading between lines, hints or body language and can cause many misunderstandings or surprises.
- 3) Being silent in high context country can have a great meaning unlike for someone from a low context country it is normal to say things over many times. A person from a low context culture can take being silent as there is something wrong or can find it strange.

Relationship

- 4) Relationships in high context culture depend on trust, are stable and build up slowly unlike in low context culture relationships begin and end quickly.

Space

- 5) Space is communal in high context culture and people stand closer to each other unlike in low context culture space is compartmentalized and privacy is important.

Formality

- 6) Formality level is higher in high context countries where they place more emphasis on social rules and tradition unlike in low context cultures where there is less emphasis on these activities.

APPENDIX 2:

Implicit / explicit communication:

1) Living with a person from a low context country often means that when they want to say 100 words they verbalize 150 words unlike someone from high context culture wants to say 150 words but verbalizes 100 words?

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

I agree, maybe, the 50 more words are questions like: Do you know what I mean? This was rather irritating at the very beginning for me before I realized it was just a phrase. Having lived in the low context country I got used to it quickly and now I must admit that I sometimes speak this way even in Czech.

b) Eva H. (wife Czech – husband US, living in US)

I think that it depends and is individual. It depends on personality, how much he/she likes to talk. Czech is great because you can express many things or experiences “easier or shorter” when you use our diminutives or puns. I personally think that Americans tend to speak at great length.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

My experience comes from a marriage with an English husband. I’ve been living in UK for 15 years. I have discussed the answers with my mother in law and sister in law (both English) and this is what we agreed on:

Yes, definitely agree with that. When my English husband talks about something, it’s more like a speech, he is very vocal and so is his side (all English) family. They all like to talk things over & over.

d) Roman P. (boyfriend Czech – girlfriend Canada, living in Australia)

Example: I have observed that some individuals would answer a direct yes/no question with a rather lengthy response that would elicit advantages/disadvantages, possible consequences of possible yes/no answer and why each of the consequences would be ok/not ok without giving a clear indication of leaning towards either yes or no. In other words, the individual would not explicitly say “yes” or “no” or “I don’t know” however would engage in elaborating about the a wide landscape of possible and often hypothetical consequences. I observe similar to some degree in my partner.

Also, although, the countries of low/high context cultures mentioned at the top of this page might show on average the traits of low/high cultures, it has been my experience that these traits could vary from individual to individual independent of what culture (low/high context) the individual is from. For example, an individual from high context culture might have propensity to show traits of low context culture and vice versa.

e) Simona (girlfriend Czech - boyfriend US, lived in US)

?

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

Agree, I tend to be flowery in my words, but some of that is due to education. I did an Arts degree. I don't think I can say my wife using fewer words to cultural reasons any more than other factors - personality, gender.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

I would say that this does not apply to our relationship. My husband can express very directly with a few words what he wants to verbalize while I use a more diplomatic approach. In deep conversations I often struggle to find the right words due to the complexity of the English language which breaks up the communication and leaves me unsatisfied.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

I have noticed that Canadians use more expressions and often comment over and over with for example "Isn't it nice?", "It is nice isn't it?" and they expect you to react or make a comment.

i) Denisa S. (Czech girlfriend – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

I don't know if I would agree with this.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

Yes, I often speak directly and ask questions when I'm curious or need clarification. I've mostly gotten positive reactions to my direct speech, but very often have heard people say I ask too many questions. They're shocked that I out right ask instead of working out the info through conversation.

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

Yes, I would agree with that. My husband is Australian and sometimes when he wants to say something, I feel like.... Just say it please. Stop beating around the bush. Don't give me long exhausting sentences, just say it.

2) The communication in low context culture is very direct and specific unlike in high context culture where it is full of reading between lines, hints or body language and can cause many misunderstandings or surprises.

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

I feel there is more interaction/action between the speakers in the low context cultures. Speakers often use short questions and immediate short reactions, whereas in the high context country it is OK to think about your answer for a while. It was more confusing for my ex-husband (Canadian)

who often repeated the question again and I had to explain I was not deaf but only thinking about my answer.

b) Eva H. (wife Czech – husband US, living in US)

I would say it is the opposite. In my experience in my Czech family we like to say things explicitly. Here in the US people kind of go around the bush, everything is “sugar coated”. People kind of overdo it and don’t tell the truth.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

This is not my experience in England, I feel the opposite, that I am more direct, getting straight to the point. The English always have to exchange “small talk” first, e.g. how are you and comments about weather before getting to the point, even at work and even though it’s obvious that you are not to go on and on about how you are.....the conversation is about something else.

d) Roman P. (boyfriend Czech – girlfriend Canada, living in Australia)

Example: I have noticed that individuals from low context cultures (e.g., US and Canada) appear to have inclination to categorize events in this world dichotomously, into yes or no, black or white etc. which could be a sign of directiveness.

Example: When discussing a specific issue or topic that is to produce a decision I find a high context culture person to be a bit loose in terms of relevance of the details she/he might introduce during the conversation. In other words, person from high context culture might share details that are not directly related (in my eyes) to the core of the conversation while staying focused on the core of an issue might be more productive in working towards a decision.

However, this is my subjective take. It has been brought to my attention that my subjective perception might not be accurately reflective of what the other person is aiming to communicate.

e) Simona (girlfriend Czech - boyfriend US, lived in US)

I cannot think of an example

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

I really have to disagree with the premise here. English is a much looser, imprecise language than CZ. Most of my reading on the subject has been that the English speaking English can cause mitteleuropa folks much annoyance because of the vagueness. Certainly at work I have found CZ and DE people to be very direct. Perhaps because IT is full of engineers.

Between us we speak mainly in ENG. After 19 years, the days of surprises and misunderstandings are in the past. That said I consciously have stripped out of my English at home in-jokes; cultural references that would not translate.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

The communication is indeed very direct and specific. However, the complexity of the English language (1 word has 10 meanings and vice versa) often leads to various interpretations and reading between the lines. The dialogue is generally interrupted by me asking the meaning of unknown words. There is also a different approach to conversation: a low context person starts telling a story with the leading point, while the high context person builds up a story which then leads to a climax.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

I can think of a situation when you are invited for a visit in CR and you stay a bit longer and they offer you to stay for a dinner that they have enough for everyone, Czechs reply is usually they would rather leave and not bother ...it was not planned, but at the same time we know it is late and we won't have enough time to make dinner. Canadians don't understand such an answer and they take it literally and think that you really need to go home and there is no more persuading. I agree and have noticed that Czechs often say NO but mean YES...so that it doesn't look bad. Low context is direct, goes to the point.

i) Denisa S. (girlfriend Czech – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

I agree completely with this. For us their direct expressing may seem insensitive but we understand it. Our expressing may often for them seem intelligible. What I refer to is to know how to say "no" to other people. When my boyfriend asked someone from the people in CR for something the answer was not "yes" or "no", there was no "no" answer at all. I had to often explain that even no one answered "no", it was clear from the whole context that they meant "no". I understood it clearly.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

?

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

I feel like Australians are very much about reading in between the lines, hints and body languages. I feel like people in the Czech Republic are more direct and say what's on their mind without talking and taking and never getting to the point.

3) Being silent in high context country has a great meaning unlike for someone from a low context country it is normal to say things over many times. A person from a low context culture can take being silent as there is something wrong or can find it strange.

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

Yes, that confirms my experiences mentioned above in the questions 1 and 2.

b) Eva H. (wife Czech – husband US, living in US)

I agree that being silent or brief can be sometimes interpreted wrong. My example: I have had it happened a few times when my husband thought I was angry when I answered briefly or didn't answer at all. So when I say things straight, which is what I'm used to from home he doesn't often like it.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

Both my mother and sister in law agree that the English always feel the need to fill in the silence. I have not had a negative experience of anyone being offended by my silence/quietness although my husband always thought at the early days of our relationship that I'm ignoring him or switching off purposely or not reacting enough to whatever he is saying.

d) Roman P. (boyfriend Czech – girlfriend Canada, living in Australia)

Example: I have observed that in general low context cultures seem to be uncomfortable with silences in communication, while individuals from high context cultures might say what they want to say and then choose silence.

From my experience silence can be understood as something without particular meaning. For example if silence is a typical behavior of a person, if there is not antecedents that could be causing silence (e.g., getting upset by something and then being silent as a result of that) or a person explicitly explains that they want to be silent because they want e.g., take a rest.

However, I have observed people who choose silence to communicate something of substance, often something of a negative emotional valence. For example, if it is unusual for particular person to be silent, or if the silence is accompanied with incongruent body language (e.g., closed off, passive/aggressive body language, silence might indicate that the person might be silent because they are upset and are not able to address an issue verbally) then there seems to be a justified reason to think that the silence is not just silence (e.g., restful silence) but there is something "wrong" i.e., an issue to be addressed etc.

Being on a receiver side of silence in human communication silence can be easily understood as rejection to communicate with others especially if it is accompanied with aforementioned incongruent body language.

e) Simona (girlfriend Czech - boyfriend US, lived in US)

?

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

Pavlina is very direct :-) Due to job, she cannot allow ambiguity.

Don't know. With experience, at work silence needs interrogating. "Does silence mean you agree?". Pavlina says when something is wrong I keep quiet.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

I have experienced this phenomenon in both cultures.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

I have already answered in question nr.1

i) Denisa S. (girlfriend Czech – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

I noticed this mainly at public places. When we were having coffee with friends from low context country, talking about some topic and there is a silent pause, we tend to understand it as natural part of conversation, some kind of pause for re .For an American, from my experience, this kind of silence is incomprehensible or even unpleasant and he/she would start thinking up a topic that would fill in the silence. I took it as not being able to be myself.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

?

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

I think silence can be strange in both contexts. I think it depends on the people you are with. How well you know them and what the situation is.

Relationship

4) Relationships in high context culture depend on trust, are stable and build up slowly unlike in low context culture relationships begin and end quickly.

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

I can confirm that in the low context culture people seem to begin relationships easily, they are very warm and friendly, but often they live for the moment, my experiences are from the summer camp in Canada where I worked as a leader. On the other hand, I also have experiences from the Czech summer camps. I have been in touch with my friends and we meet every year for the reunion. My ex-husband could not understand why I want to meet with the same people every summer and we go on holidays together as families with children and help each other.

b) Eva H. (wife Czech – husband US, living in the US)

In the US you don't see these family gatherings like in the Czech Republic where different generations visit and gather often, spend time at their cottages, helping each other , cooking together.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

I don't agree on the point that relationships (as in friendships) end quickly. My husband has a large group of friends from his youth and he still sees them regularly. Two of my best friends here are English, we have met years ago when our children were little and our friendships are

very strong. Members of my English family also all have long term friendships, no difference from the Czech Republic.

Relationships do begin quicker than in the Czech Republic; the English are very good at chatting informally with complete strangers. My children and I always laugh when we go on holidays and my husband starts talking to our fellow holiday makers at the bar, our children call them: "Daddy's new best friends".

d) Roman P. (boyfriend Czech – girlfriend Canada, living in Australia)

Example: It has been my experience that to build a relationship in The Czech Republic takes relatively long time, requires many shared experiences in variety of circumstances when compared to building relationships in Australia. For example, in Australia one may become friend with other over a party or a single encounter, however in Czech it might take several parties/encounters and participating in several other activities together to build a friendship. Building relationships in Australia seems to be quicker, takes lesser number of shared experiences however seems to remain shallower and might be terminated more easily relative to The Czech Republic. Saying that, these are generalizations and there are exceptions that could be contrary to these generalizations.

e) Simona (girlfriend Czech - boyfriend US, lived in US)

I agree with that. From my own experience it takes a long time to let people closer to me. I keep my own distance. But once I open up to someone I usually take a good care of the relationship.

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

don't know. In my dealings with native English speakers there is a common frame of reference, a shorthand for simple conversations, e.g. going for a beer with someone talking about sport or the weather. But meaningful relationships do take time and need trust whatever the cultural frame. I think also that different communication channels are changing the way in which all of us speak in any case.

But when my wife and me go for a drink in our village we have the same low stakes conversations with Czechs as well.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

My example would be honesty and the definition of honesty. My husband values honesty above everything while I think that using a white lie in some situations saves someone from being hurt. We often clash in various situations as my approach is always diplomatic whilst my husband's approach is direct and that often comes across as harsh.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

I think that relationship between friends is more stable but probably because people didn't move and stayed living at one place. They knew their surroundings well and their friendship kept from the childhood. In low context countries people are more mobile and it may lead to an impression that they are shallower. A good example of the shallower relationship is when people meet by chance and start talking.

i) Denisa S. (girlfriend Czech – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

Meaning establishing friendship (I don't mean two partners in relationship) I noticed was like "What can you provide for me at the time". Relationship is conditioned, based on exact calculation ". As a simple example I can provide paying for a beer in a bar for friends that are short of money. Czech would know that if he pays for a beer for a friend he would not expect the reciprocal payment back. For an American not paying back for a gift provided (beer) is a private thing, he would take this in this regard as misusing or taking advantage of the other person. Relationship is disrupted immediately. Seems like he is not able to perceive the other person in the context of his situation where he finds himself. Their society is more individualistic. They try to perceive themselves and other on the same level.

Another example would be a friend of his doesn't have time for him or doesn't pick up his phone. He takes it as disrespect towards his person. He doesn't think of the context of a situation and ask himself why he doesn't pick up the phone – hi might be busy or is going through hard time or just simply doesn't want to talk to anybody and wants to be left alone. His thinking is always aimed towards himself. All this shows total mistrust towards others.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

Perhaps because I'm a people person, perhaps from being a foreigner, or who knows why, but I have formed several instant friendships that have lasted in Czech Republic. We formed friendships through language exchange lessons, going to church together or our children being classmates, or even working together. I've heard this about Czechs taking longer to build close, lasting friendships...I just haven't experienced this as much personally.

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

agreed

Space

5) Space is communal in high context culture and people stand closer to each other unlike in low context culture space is compartmentalized and privacy is important.

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

I was used to going tramping and walking in nature from the Czech Republic, and I wanted to walk in nature in Canada, too. However, it was not possible as many places were private, you have to walk only along the tracks and camp at the special places.

b) Eva H. (wife Czech - husband US, living in US)

I agree completely. I like my personal space and don't being pushed or leaned upon but it's an extreme case in the US. An example: A lady in the supermarket who is about good free meters away from my shopping cart would start saying from that distance: "Excuse me". The privacy bubble is much digger here in the US than it is in the Czech Republic.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

This is quite difficult for me to answer as I don't like standing/sitting too close to other people myself but my mother and sister in law agreed with the statement and answered with the following example: If you go to the beach in England you have to make sure you're not sitting too close to anyone/group of others, it would be considered rude.

d) Roman P. (boyfriend Czech – girlfriend Canada, living in Australia)

Having lived in both Czech and Australian cultures I haven't observed that people would vary significantly and systematically on how far they would stand from each in communal spaces as a result of being from either high or low context culture. However, it seems to me that Australian culture is more individualistic, protective of personal space and privacy relative to Czech culture. Again, there are individual differences that would be in contrast with the average.

e) Simona (girlfriend Czech - boyfriend US, lived in US)

?

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

I am not sure I am representative here. Space is important to me. Not sure whether it because I'm British or it's because my parents gave me no object-permanence.

My wife says she allows people closer to her at work than me.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

I have not experienced any differences between the two cultures so far. This possibly has to do with my husband's distinguished European background.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

?

i) Denisa S. (girlfriend Czech – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

My ex- American boyfriend did not like to be close to people .He kept a certain space bubble around him when being on public transport or at the table in a restaurant.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

Yes, even after living in CR 13 years, I'm still unnerved at times by how close people stand to me on public transit or in lines at the store.

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

agreed

Formality

6) Formality level is higher in high context countries where they place more emphasis on social rules and tradition unlike in low context cultures where there is less emphasis on these activities.

a) Eva M. (wife Czech - husband Canada, lived in Canada)

This has been a pleasant experience so far, I like calling people their first name and I like when people call me my first name, too. Living back in the Czech Republic, my ex-husband had troubles to understand why he should call sb. e.g. Mr. Novák when he was John.

b) Eva H. (Czech woman - American husband, living in US)

I agree more or less here. It already starts with English not using “tykáni” a “vykáni”. That’s where I see a big difference. In the US people are more forthcoming when it comes down to rules defying. When we look at regular social situation such as going to the restaurant or theater, people are dressed rather “casual”. I think that going to the theater wearing jeans is not proper. People would go to the average restaurant wearing sweatshirts or track pants that you wouldn’t see that much in the Czech Republic. People in the US are taught to be self confident but sometimes it slips away to be on the edge of being too assertive or slightly rude. The same goes with traditions. There are many traditions that are borrowed and mixed because of the High number of immigrants “Big melting pot”. An Example here from the park where some children there would call at me: “Hey”. It depends on the family upbringing. An example from work: Formal rules are followed here. At business dinner you can slip away to “controlled” informality sometimes too personal but then the situation gets back to the formal usual one. An example from a supermarket: A lady that standing about 3 m from me starts saying: “Excuse me”. The privacy bubble is much bigger in the US than it is in the Czech Republic.

c) Tereza B. (wife Czech – husband UK, living in UK)

The English are definitely less formal than the Czechs. Nobody calls you Mr or Mrs apart from bank employees or doctor's surgery, so when introducing someone you are immediately using their first names.

When I first moved to UK, I found the informality from complete strangers a bit too much e.g. cashier in a supermarket would call me "love" and quiz me into details about what I'm doing today, where I'm from, how old is my son etc. I am now completely used to it and prefer it to the formal way of talking to strangers used in the Czech Republic.

d) Roman P. (Czech husband – Canadian wife, both living in Australia)

I would say that there is more conformity to social rules, to social expectations and to staying within boundaries of 'proper' behaviors in Czech culture than in Australian culture.

For example, it has been my perception that individuals in The Czech Republic would be concerned to be within the average and not stand out in any way. This could be rooted in decades long socialistic government with heavy propaganda supported from Russia that is responsible for implementing group like thinking, importance of traditions and reinforcing importance group identity. However, the inclination to conform might be more true in Czech for older generations and younger generation might adopt more individualistic approach to life with increased influence of the west since regime change in 1989.

In low context cultures (e.g., US, Canada, Australia) I have observed that differentiating from the average, standing out, being great and outstanding is encouraged, celebrated and rewarded in these cultures.

e) Simona (Czech girlfriend – American boyfriend, lived in US)

Greeting in low context country (USA) is not as formal as in high context country. It obviously depends on events. But in general people hug a lot. I remember after I came back to Czech Republic I would throw myself at people and gave them the real big hug (as I was so used to it in US). But people here were a little surprised.

The biggest difference I see is in customer service in stores between low and high context countries. Shop assistants in Czech Republic are still usually very unpleasant. Customer service in low context countries is on a way different level.

f) Bill (wife Czech – husband UK, living in CR)

Again disagree here. Whilst here in CZ there are some obvious signs of formality - vykani, ballroom dancing for teenagers - that doesn't mean they don't have them in the UK. Look at Golf clubs; parliament; the Queen. Perhaps people who are expats over here have left their homelands because they don't want to follow the rules. I have a certain freedom here because no Czech person expects me to behave like Ladislav Spacek.

g) Petra (wife Czech – husband Australia, living in Australia)

Very true and probably based on historical events (Australia is still a very young country). One example would be celebrating Christmas which is big in the Czech culture connected with beautiful childhood memories. In my husband's culture celebrating Christmas means spending a whole day at the beach, having a barbecue and drinking wine. Christmas can be a little bit disappointing for me as I value the celebration very much and for my husband this holiday is totally unimportant.

h) Martina M. (wife Czech – husband Canada, living in Canada)

I think it is easier here in Canada, people don't worry whether address someone with the first name, it was hard at the start but I got used to it. Also you don't see people shaking hands and looking you in the eyes directly in the Canada when greeting each other.

i) Denisa S. (girlfriend Czech – boyfriend US, lived in CR)

I can think of one example here but I am not sure if it is connected with this formality issue. We had two train tickets with the seats booked. The train was quite full and there were two older people sitting in our seats. My ex boyfriend did not hesitate and kept insisting on getting his seats that he paid for. I refused to sit down because for me knowing that those two people would have to stand up was unacceptable. I looked at that situation from social point of view but my ex boyfriend took it as something he had right for because he paid for it.

j) Rebekah B. (wife US – husband Czech, lived in CR)

For me, coming from a country speaking a language that doesn't have a separate way of identifying formal or informal talk, it's very easy for me to accidentally use the wrong form – even now! This has caused some embarrassment like in a doctors office, but it's also inadvertently breached the relationship gap and forged new friendships when the person I accidentally addressed informally said it was quite fine and we then continued informally intentionally. This happened with one neighbor when we lived near Prague Andel 8 years ago. We are still in touch.

k) Katka M. (wife Czech – husband Australia, lived in Australia, now living in CR)

agreed

