

TIME PERCEPTION: MONOCHRONIC vs POLYCHRONIC
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KEY TO ACTIVITIES**Part 1****COUNTRIES****Monochronic**

Countries where things are typically done one at a time, where time is segmented into precise, small units, and where time is scheduled, arranged and managed. Time itself is treated as a commodity of high value, as necessary as or perhaps even more important than satisfaction, good work, and relationships. As a result, this view of time may be stressful.

In such a culture, the conception of time is linear: it can be saved, spent, wasted, or lost; it can hurry by or slow down, and so on. A paramount value is placed on organised and controlled schedules, tasks and “getting the job done”. In monochronic cultures, everything is organized and dominated by a very rigid conception of time: man’s social and professional life can be dominated by their time perception. This perception of time is probably rooted in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Century.

Examples are the United States, Germany and Switzerland, to which could be added Britain, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, and the Scandinavian countries.

Polychronic

Countries where several things can be done at once, and a less strict approach is taken to scheduling time. Such cultures tend to be less focused on the precise moment, and much more in tradition and relationships rather than in tasks. Polychronic cultures view time as being more flexible. Because life isn’t entirely predictable, scheduling and being precise are seen as simply not that important. In addition, relationships with people are valued more than staying on schedule. More value is placed on “being” than on “doing.”

Polychronic cultures have a much less formal perception of time and are not ruled by precise calendars and schedules. The arbitrary divisions of clock time and calendars have less importance to them than the cycle of the seasons, community life, and the calendar of religious festivities. Their perception of time is considered to be more connected to “natural rhythms,” and to “the earth”.

Many Latin American, African, Asian and Arab cultures fall into this category, especially countries like Mexico, Pakistan, India, rural China, the Philippines, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Variably Monochronic

A group of “in between” countries.

Countries, including Russia, Southern Europe and much of East-Central Europe are sometimes referred to as variably monochronic cultures.

Adapted from: <http://www.exactlywhatistime.com/other-aspects-of-time/time-in-different-cultures/>

Exercise 2

In today's globalized world, understanding the time orientation of a culture is critical to the successful handling of **diplomatic** and **business** situations. Misunderstandings of chronemics can lead to a failure to understand intentions, especially in business and political communication. For example, monochronists may view polychronists as undisciplined, lazy, irresponsible and untrustworthy, while polychronists may consider monochronists to be obsessed with rules and formalities, and emotionally cold.

- The idea of being late versus on time for a meeting, may differ widely between an American businessperson and a Brazilian; the American businessperson might be far less tolerant of a Brazilian's late arrival. However, the Brazilian businessperson may be offended by an American's insistence on punctuality or on getting right down to business; the Brazilian would generally prefer to finish talking with colleagues first and would not want to cut a conversation short in order to make an appointment.
- A British businessman in Saudi Arabia is keen to secure an important deal. He has a tight schedule and cannot afford to waste time. His frustration increases because he has to wait for ages for an appointment with his Saudi partner. Meetings never start on time, and when they do, there are frequent interruptions, with people coming in to get papers signed. The Saudi partner even takes phone calls when his visitor is in the room.
- Eskimos working in a factory in Alaska could not cope with the factory's whistle that alerted them to break times, etc. In their culture, human activities are determined by the sea tides, when they will take place and how long they will last. High tide defines certain types of activities, low tide defines others.
- In another example, Germans employed in Honduras complained that the factory workers came to work every day half an hour late. The answer was: yes, but they *come*, which is in itself exceptional. It was felt that the Germans had to no reason to complain.

From these examples, we see that the notion of waiting, linked to the perception of time, varies from one culture to the next and this may cause cultural misunderstandings. These examples show a clash between a polychronic and monochronic culture.

Polychronic individuals feel that appointments can be changed and that most projects can undergo important changes until the last minute. On the contrary, in monochronic cultures, everything is organized and dominated by a very rigid conception of time: man's social and professional life can be dominated by his or her time perception.

Adapted from:

<https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/everything-time-monochronism-polychronism-orientation-6902>

Part 2

PEOPLE

KEY

Monochronic orientation

- 1 - They know their schedules ahead of time and organise their week in advance.
- 4 - They must schedule every task in a calendar or daily planner with a detailed plan and allocated time for completion.
- 5 - Relationships started in a particular environment (gym, professional meeting, one day at a party, etc) remain acquaintances, are sustained within a specified time frame and end when the “business” goal is met.
- 8 - Being punctual means showing respect for other people’s schedules.
- 12 - They must complete a current task before moving on to the next.
- 13 - Every person is accountable for their time and this enables managers/teachers/parents to see more easily if employees/students/children are completing the necessary tasks.
- 15 - Completing tasks within a given time frame and adhering to scheduled events indicates that you are performing well.
- 17 - Meeting deadlines promptly shows that a person is conscious of their fellows’ time and busy lives.
- 18 - They are able to work within a specific frame of time and then stop.

Polychronic orientation

- 2 - Everyone pulls together to accomplish the tasks of the day, so an individual who completes their part will move on to help others.
- 3 - Tasks might take longer to complete; the more leisurely pace also contributes to their positive mental health.
- 6 - There is no specific time frame to create a relationship.
- 7 - Working as a group takes the stress off individuals and makes room for multi-tasking.
- 9 - Consistent flow of information among members of the team also means everyone knows each other’s tasks and can help where possible.
- 10 - They communicate crucial information with a lot of accompanying background information.
- 11 - Allowing (and often encouraging) workers/students to jump across their typical job functions and contribute to supporting their peers.
- 14 - Someone may be working on a task while on the phone talking to another person sharing information.
- 16 - Relationships develop over time to foster trust and friendship, making it easier and less stressful to keep new contacts.

Monochronic time orientation									Polychronic time orientation								
4	1	5	8	12	13	15	17	18	2	3	6	7	9	10	11	14	16

Slide 6

TIME PERCEPTION: MONOCHRONIC vs POLYCHRONIC



Part 1

PEOPLE

Exercise 1

Complete the table according to which of the following statements you consider appropriate for either monochronic or polychronic types of 'time culture'.

1. They know their schedules ahead of time and organise their week in advance.
2. Everyone pulls together to accomplish the tasks of the day, so an individual who completes their part will move on to help others.
3. Tasks might take longer to complete; the more leisurely pace also contributes to their positive mental health.
4. They must schedule every task in a calendar or daily planner with a detailed plan and allocated time for completion.
5. Relationships started in a particular environment (gym, professional meeting, one day at a party, etc) remain acquaintances, are sustained within a specified time frame and end when the "business" goal is met.
6. There is no specific time frame to create a relationship.
7. Working as a group takes the stress off individuals and makes room for multi-tasking.
8. Being punctual means showing respect for other people's schedules.
9. Consistent flow of information among members of the team also means everyone knows each other's tasks and can help where possible.
10. They communicate crucial information with a lot of accompanying background information.
11. Allowing (and often encouraging) workers/students to jump across their own functions tasks and contribute to supporting their peers.
12. They must complete a current task before moving on to the next.
13. Every person is accountable for their time and this enables managers/teachers/parents to see more easily if employees/students/children are completing the necessary tasks.
14. Someone may be working on a task while on the phone talking to another person sharing information.
15. Completing tasks within a given time frame and adhering to scheduled events indicates that you are performing well.
16. Relationships develop over time to foster trust and friendship, making it easier and less stressful to keep new contacts.
17. Meeting deadlines promptly shows that a person is conscious of their fellows' time and busy lives.
18. They are able to work within a specific frame of time and then stop.

Monochronic time orientation								Polychronic time orientation							
4															

Exercise 2: Decide on whether you are more of a monochronic type or person or a polychronic. Write your reasons. Tell your classmate.

Part 2

COUNTRIES

It helps to know that different cultures have different expectations or assign different meanings to what time is. Some cultures perceive time to be scarce or linear, while others believe time to be infinite. Some view time management as a skill; others find it unimportant.

Exercise 1

Read about their characteristics and then try to guess three or more countries which could be included into each category. Why? Do you think it is important for international relationships among countries?

Monochronic
<p>Countries where things are typically done one at a time, where time is segmented into precise, small units, and where time is scheduled, arranged and managed. Time itself is treated as a commodity of high value, as necessary as or perhaps even more important than satisfaction, good work, and relationships. As a result, this view of time may be stressful.</p> <p>In such a culture, the conception of time is linear: it can be saved, spent, wasted, or lost; it can hurry by or slow down, and so on. A paramount value is placed on organised and controlled schedules, tasks and “getting the job done”. In monochronic cultures, everything is organized and dominated by a very rigid conception of time: man’s social and professional life can be dominated by their time perception. This perception of time is probably rooted in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Century.</p>
Polychronic
<p>Countries where several things can be done at once, and a less strict approach is taken to scheduling time. Such cultures tend to be less focused on the precise moment, and much more in tradition and relationships rather than in tasks. Polychronic cultures view time as being more flexible. Because life isn’t entirely predictable, scheduling and being precise are seen as simply not that important. In addition, relationships with people are valued more than staying on schedule. More value is placed on “being” than on “doing.”</p> <p>Polychronic cultures have a much less formal perception of time and are not ruled by precise calendars and schedules. The arbitrary divisions of clock time and calendars have less importance to them than the cycle of the seasons, community life, and the calendar of religious festivities. Their perception of time is considered to be more connected to “natural rhythms,” and to “the earth”.</p>
Variably Monochronic
A group of “in between” countries.

Exercise 2

Imagine now the different situations and discuss with your peers how the different time conceptions between the nationalities can interfere in their relationships. How do you think each of them feels about the other and their way to face life?

- A meeting organised between an American business person and a Brazilian.
- A British businessman in Saudi Arabia trying to secure a business deal.
- Eskimos working in a factory in Alaska.
- Germans employed in Honduras.

Exercise 3

Look at the infographics of the different countries on *slides 7 and 8*. You will be assigned one of them by your teacher. Invent a situation in which you act according to your country's time perception.

Tell or act it out in front of your group – half or whole class depending on the size of it.



Charlie Chaplin on the film set of *Modern Times* (1936)
Photo by Max M. Autrey, Image courtesy MPTV.net