

TIME PERSPECTIVES



OUR PLANS FOR TOMORROW BECOME THE ACTIONS OF TODAY AND THEN THE MEMORIES OF PAST TIMES

Everyone is aware of the three elements of time: the present, the past and the future but this does not mean that everyone focuses on these elements in the same way. Different cultures see these three aspects of time differently.

Western European cultures, including Australia and North America tend to have a strong future focus: what's happening in the present will reflect on a good future outcome. The past is relatively unimportant, in the end, 'you can't change history'.

Cultures with a present focus let go of the past, don't worry about the future and fully enjoy the experience of the present. This focus can be extremely relaxing but it can lead to the need for immediate gratification which does not always happen.

Some more traditional societies such as African, Asian and those in Southern Europe, tend to have a past focus. What we are today is the result of the work of previous generations. Consequently, they are focused on preserving their history, respecting family and the elders. For them, the present is a continuation of the past and there's not much point in doing too much planning for an uncertain future.

Being aware of these different perspectives can help you understand why different people manage time differently.

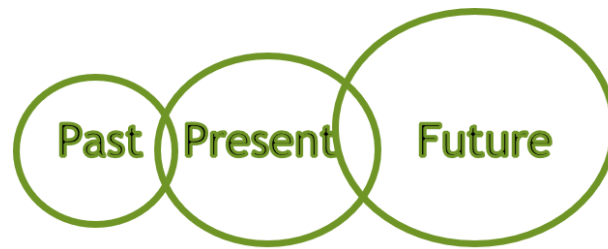
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THE TIME CIRCLE TEST

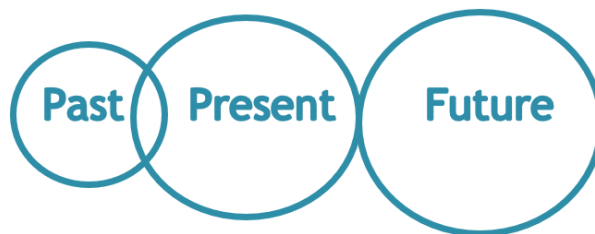
How do you manage your time? Do you have a strong present focus? Do you consider your current activity as important as to keep engaged in it no matter whether it has gone on too long in time as to make you late for the next meeting? Or do you, on the contrary, cut it short to be on time for your next activity?

We are going to find out where you and your team are in the conception of time. Are you future-focused or are you anchored in the past? To check this we are going to use [Tom Cottle's Circle Test](#).

Example:



The green circles represent a strong future focus with the present contributing into achieving future outcomes. There is little connection to the past. This may be typical for a lot of time conscious ‘western’ cultures.



The blue circles show a strong present focus firmly grounded in past experiences and traditions. The present is a bit more important than the past but the future is of lesser importance and not really connected to the present. Don't expect someone from this culture to be on time!

Bourne, L, Perspectives on Time Management

<https://projectmanager.com.au/perspectives-on-time-management/>

Instructions:

- Grab a piece of paper and thinking about the meaning of the future, the past and the present for you, draw three circles arranging them in the way that best shows how you feel about the relationship between the past, present and future. Use different size circles to indicate relative importance and separate or overlap the circles depending on how much influence each one has on the others. When you have finished, label each circle to show which one is the past, which one the present and which one the future.
- Then, compare your production to your team classmates'. How is it different? Our individual perspectives of time affect our work, health and well-being. We have different relationships with time. Explain why you drew the circles like that and decide in which category you would fit best: **past-oriented**, **present-oriented** or

future-oriented. Are you slow to accept changes? Do you like keeping family rituals? Or are you present-oriented and you live the moment, live for pleasure and avoid pain? Do you think our life is fated? Or on the contrary, do you think of possible future consequences of different actions? Are you ready to endure unpleasant current situations that have the potential for positive future outcomes?

- Now, take one of the labelled sticks provided. Go around the class looking for people who have your same label. Get together and continue the list with your views on the three values of time. What thoughts, considerations or actions in your life make you think that you belong to this group of people?



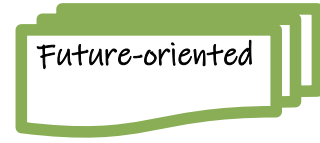
- You think a lot about past experiences

- You do not take risks.



- It doesn't pay to plan. You never know how it is going to work out.

- You seek sensation.



- You focus on if-then reasoning, logical analysis.

- You show clear concern for the consequences of your acts.

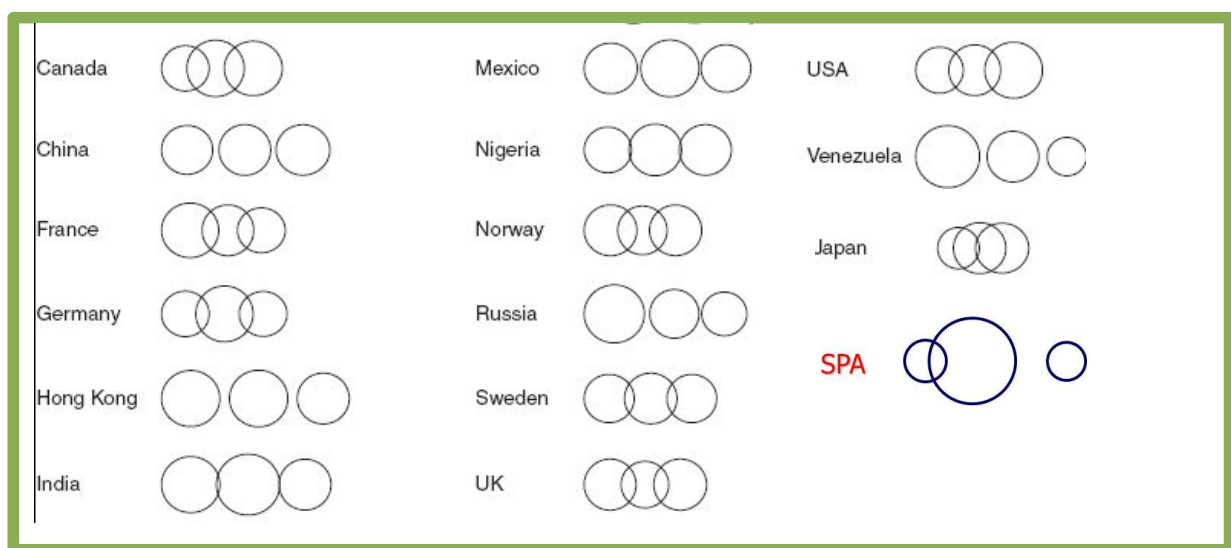
- Get together in the class group and try to elaborate a common list of characteristics and beliefs for each category. Discuss about them. Decide whether a person can belong to more than one of them.

Cultural diversity is important but also personality traits can make you see this differently from your classmates. Have you ever wondered why some people are always late for meetings or why some people get really upset when you are late whilst you don't really mind waiting? Why is this so if time passes at a steady rate of 60 seconds every minute and 60 minutes every hour for everyone?

Continually pushing forward to achieve artificial deadlines can destroy opportunities and ought to be balanced with the need to "get things done". On the other hand, letting things go may mean reaching the 100 per cent of the scope and getting the most out of every experience. It might be difficult to understand and accept other people's conceptions on time perspective, but it is definitely worth the attempt.

Many of life's puzzles can be solved by simply understanding our own **time perspective** and that of others.

- The next activity goes on to analysing into which category different nationalities and countries belong and why. Do you agree with the diagram provided? Do you think that Spain's (SPA) time perspective as a nationality really corresponds to the representation?



Adapted from: [The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Intercultural Competence](#)

In pairs or small groups choose a country and using historical evidence, current news or your knowledge of the country to give arguments for or against that evidence whether the graphic is right or wrong.