

Observing the Workplace

Below is a list of questions to prompt or guide your observations as you adjust in your new workplace. You don't need to answer these questions or use this list if you are more comfortable carrying out your observations in some other fashion. What is important is to take note of the differences between what you see here and what you would expect to see happening in a comparable workplace in your home country.

Nonverbal Communication

- ◇ How do people dress?
- ◇ How do they greet each other in the morning?
- ◇ What is the protocol for going in and out of someone's office?
- ◇ Do people maintain eye contact when they talk?
- ◇ How far apart do people stand?

Mono/Polychronic Behaviors

- ◇ Do people come to work on time? Who does and who doesn't?
- ◇ What happens when someone who is talking to someone else gets a telephone call?
- ◇ What does a third person do when approaching two others who are already in conversation?
- ◇ Do meetings start on time?
- ◇ How long do people with appointments have to wait?

Power Distance Behaviors

- ◇ How do subordinates treat their superiors?
- ◇ How do superiors treat subordinates?
- ◇ Do you see evidence of bosses delegating authority or holding on to it?
- ◇ Do you see evidence of subordinates taking initiative, or just waiting for instruction?
- ◇ Who do people eat lunch with? Do they eat only with their peers, or is there mixing of the ranks?

Communication Styles

- ◇ How is conflict handled?
- ◇ How is disagreement expressed?
- ◇ How is bad news or a negative concern communicated?
- ◇ How important does saving face seem to be?
- ◇ Are people generally direct or indirect in their conversation?
- ◇ Does this appear to be a high or low context workplace?

Other Workplace Norms

- ◇ When people interact, do they get to the task right away or talk more generally?
- ◇ Do people work closely together or more independently?
- ◇ Are women treated differently from men? If so, in what way?
- ◇ What kind of behaviors in workers seem to be rewarded? What are people praised for?
- ◇ What does the prevailing attitude seem to be about rules and procedures and the need to follow them?

Exercise adapted from "Culture Matters," a Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook.