



# Customs of the World: Using Cultural Intelligence to Adapt, Wherever You Are

*David Livermore*

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## **Customs of the World: Using Cultural Intelligence to Adapt, Wherever You Are** David Livermore

Why do people from certain cultures have little regard for time? Why might working overtime reflect poorly on you in Scandinavia? Why should you avoid using your left hand when interacting with someone from the Arab world?

Taught by an international adviser to leaders of Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and governments, *Customs of the World* reveals how you can actively improve your cultural intelligence in an increasingly globalized world. Based on groundbreaking research, these twenty-four lectures address dynamics and customs related to working, socializing, dining, marriage and family--all the areas necessary to help you function with a greater level of respect and effectiveness wherever you go. You'll also encounter practical tips and crucial context for greeting, interacting with, and even managing people from other parts of the world.

In the first half, you'll analyze ten cultural value dimensions researchers have identified as helpful for comparing cultures, and you'll see how these "archetypes" play out in day-to-day lives. In the second half, you'll examine ten cultural clusters around the world that, when combined with your understanding of the ten cultural dimensions, provide strategic insight into how to be more effective as you live, work, and travel in the globalized world.

## **Customs of the World: Using Cultural Intelligence to Adapt, Wherever You Are Details**

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Author : David Livermore

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# From Reader Review *Customs of the World: Using Cultural Intelligence to Adapt, Wherever You Are* for online ebook

## Ben Smitthimedhin says

Instead of preparing for my own wedding today, I've decided to write a review of Livermore's lectures on cultural intelligence. I guess doing reviews on goodreads is kind of cathartic in a sense, and I'm hoping it would somehow calm my nerves for the upcoming event. First off, this is an audiobook. Yes, I do feel torn every time I do a review of the Great Courses because I always feel like I'm cheating. But at the same time, I felt it important enough to recommend it to everyone, and also because there is a book version that is very similar to this one (so I've heard).

*Customs of the World* was one of those very important books that are helpful for navigating through 21st century America and its hodgepodge of cultures. Livermore walks the audience through each cultural dimension, explaining why your friend Santiago is always late to meetings, why your friend Kim eats with chopsticks, and what Ubuntu (I am because we are) means to Africans. The chapters include power distance, time, low vs. high context, particularism vs. universalism, uncertainty avoidance, cooperation vs. competition, and many more fascinating looks at how each culture functions within these colors.

The second part of the book deals with specific regions of the world (Ango cultures, Arab world, Sub saharan Africa, South Asia, Confucius Asia, etc.) and their own customs. Livermore's assessment of each region was very respectful, and I felt like he represented each country very well, albeit our differences.

Because of my own unique background in being mingled up with two completely different cultures (Anglo and south Asia), I am unsure of what to do on this important day of my life. So I decided to go swimming because it was both something I could do and something I could relax while I'm doing (doing vs. being). Turns out the pool was closed today and I guess I had enough time to write a review in honor of goodreads because of its significance in my own life (and also because I needed a distraction, a product of the Anglo influence). Anyways, I'm sure I've got stuff to do, and it's inevitable that I will forget something on my way over. I was hoping that forgetfulness would be a cultural trait, and it was nothing short of a disappointment to find out that I only have myself to blame.

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## Daria says

It was an okay course. David Livermore is a great lecturer, professional and responsible. However, I am not sure the topic itself has any value. At least not in a form where you are given tips on how to behave in a "cluster" that is comprised of such countries as Mongolia, Russia, Greece and many more. AND those tips are given to you in 30 minutes. I really don't think it's all that useful: Mongols and Greeks, for all the clustering you try to do, do not belong to the same cultural space.

What I liked:

- David Livermore's approach. He seems a genuinely kind and respectful person. He manages to talk about everyone with respect.
- Constant reminders by mr. Livermore that all he says is "just orientative" and that, of course, different cultures in one "cluster" will be different, and that individuals from one culture will also be different and that

basically you shouldn't treat his course as more than pure entertainment.

- The last lecture where he gives practical tips on how to travel intelligently. That I really liked and would recommend to every traveller to pay attention to.
- The main advice given by Mr. Livermore: be patient when you are dealing with people from other cultures.

What I didn't like:

- The whole "science" of cultural intelligence. The ten or eight "cultural value dimensions" are completely impossible to remember and keep in mind. More than that, I am convinced they are useless - there will always be too many exceptions to the rule. It honestly feels like a way to use stereotypes for comprehension of other cultures.

Overall, this feels like a "make yourself feel good about yourself" course: it allows a person who generally doesn't really have to deal with other cultures to feel mighty international.

(probably valuable information in light of my review: I myself am a Russian who permanently lives in Catalonia and has strong connections with England as well)

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### **Jacques Bezuidenhout says**

Great book about Customs / Cultures of the world.

David Livermore does an outstanding job in this lecture series.

Once again the Great Courses books deliver.

There is a lot to be said for understanding why people behave in a certain way. And why doing things you usually do, might offend them.

This book helps shed some light on these areas in different places in the world.

Even if you don't know/understand every culture, just knowing that you should be conscious about certain behaviours will go a long way.

There are also useful tips on how to better engage with people (breaking the ice).

This is a must read for pretty much anyone.

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### **Petra CigareX says**

**Update** I'm reading the Arab cluster and the author is explaining the reasons for the preference for boy children over girls. One of the reasons is because a boy can bring honour to the family, a girl can only bring shame. Reading that made me so sad. A boy has the ability to move in the world and by his actions, bring honour. A girl is born with honour. Her role is to be a submissive daughter, wife and mother. If she fulfils those roles correctly, she maintains her and the family honour. Should she deviate from the correct path, she brings shame. And the wages of shame are...

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This was so brilliant - at least a 10 star book, that I'm doing an instant reread. Some chapters I'm reading for

the third or fourth time. I've been to at least 44 countries (I was a sailor, also business) and if I'd had this book first, I would have had a much better time.

I like anthropology and (to some extent) sociology and was expecting a book that fit into those two genres. And so it does. But not traditional anthropology. The first half of the book is devoted to types of culture and how to deal with people who come from that culture. An example. We in the West tend to be monochronologic - we live by the clock, unpunctuality is frowned upon and can be crucial in business. So travelling to, say, India, could be difficult. They are polychronologic which allows them to prioritise events right up until they are acted on. In practical terms this means that you might not get met for a drink until 10 pm even if you had arranged 7 pm cocktails, or maybe they won't turn up at all, and they probably won't phone to let you know, because in their culture it isn't necessary. So you will need to adjust. However, the Indian might also be making adjustments because he is aware how you treat time, so you might get a phone call. But don't count on it.

The second half of the book, which is split into 24 lectures, is about the cultural groups of nations. This is where nations share more common cultural traits with each other based upon their history and philosophy, be it religion such as Christianity or philosophy such as the Nordic countries. This doesn't mean to say that the countries are alike - the Anglo group, UK, US, Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand etc. do have a common base to draw upon, but we are still very different.

So the book is fantastic, best one of the year so far and I can't see how it can be bettered. This is not a review, it's an interim report. A review would require much thinking about and details, so that's for after I've finished it (again).

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### **Silas says**

This was an interesting structuring of cultural differences and how they manifest across the world. I was a bit disappointed at first by how much the first half focuses on business, since that is simply not important to me, but I understand that it is important to other people, and luckily, much of it was still applicable in non-business situations, and the second half was much less business-focused. It was well laid out, and informative. A lot of it was a refresher for me, since I took an intercultural communication class in college, but there were some new ideas here, as well as specific examples I had not yet encountered. If you are planning to travel, this could be helpful, and if you are getting involved in international business, this would be a great place to start.

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### **Kelly says**

I really liked this book. I deal with all types of people and this really puts things in perspective. It also clued me in on some of my own personality traits and where they came from. I recommend this educational book especially if you deal with many cultures.

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### **Debbie "DJ" says**

This is a series of 24 lectures that I listened to on audio. The first half describes the many different beliefs

and characteristics of a culture. The second half goes into what are called "cultural clusters" of the world, how they were formed, and how they function based on the various attitudes described in the first section.

There is a lot of material here, and I'm finding it difficult to review as so much information needs a second, or third listen. This is not dry material though, I found Livermore's speaking style easy to understand, with many clear examples which brought the material alive. His knowledge and advice was simply fascinating. The information really broadened my awareness, and gave me many new insights into why people behave so differently.

It's easy to believe one's own way of thinking, or values are best, but if I wasn't raised in America my view of life could be very different. One of the examples that Livermore used I found very helpful. He describes individualistic vs. collective cultures, meaning some cultures value what's best for the whole vs. valuing individual rights above all. In his example he describes a collectivist society which allows its citizens to own only one dog of a smaller limited breed. Another, who place serious restrictions on what time of day noise is allowed. When members of those societies were asked how they felt about these limitations, most praised them. They enjoyed having periods of time for peace and quiet, and didn't understand why anyone would want to live next to an owner of multiple or large dogs. It's hard for me to even imagine giving up such freedoms! (Although, the peace and quiet does sound inciting.)

As our world becomes more globalized, recognizing and understanding the role cultural values play is critical. I felt listening to these talks invaluable, and highly recommend.

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## **Patricia says**

The book was so packed with observations that were both fascinating and practical, I think I'll find myself wanting to listen again in years to come. It's about how culture profoundly affects how people and societies interact, along with practical advice on how to observe and interact with people from all cultures and subcultures both around the world and at home. This course is invaluable not only to world travelers, but to anybody who engages with people from other cultures, whether at work or socially.

Professor Livermore divides the course into three sections. The first explains the concept behind cultural intelligence. The second set of lectures is a comprehensive look at the ten established dimensions along which cultures consistently differ. The final set of lectures takes a deep dive into each of the major cultural regions of the world, pointing out the dominant norms of each, along with suggestions on how to observe and interact with people from within those regions.

This course as an exploration of ten cultural value dimensions:

1. Identity—Individualist versus Collectivist
2. Authority—Low versus High Power Distance
3. Risk—Low versus High Uncertainty Avoidance
4. Achievement—Cooperative versus Competitive
5. Time—Punctuality versus Relationships
6. Communication—Direct versus Indirect
7. Lifestyle—Being versus Doing

8. Rules—Particularist versus Universalist
9. Expressiveness—Neutral versus Affective
10. Social Norms—Tight versus Loose

Followed by applying them to ten global culture clusters:

1. Anglo Cultures
2. Nordic European Cultures
3. Germanic Cultures
4. Eastern European/Central Asian Cultures
5. Latin European Cultures
6. Latin American Cultures
7. Confucian Asian Cultures
8. South Asian Cultures
9. Sub-Saharan African Cultures
10. Arab Cultures

It's not a full guide of do's and don'ts, but it provides some key guidelines on each social clusters and how to learn more.

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### **Jaime says**

I just finished a year of traveling around the globe and I intend to embark on another in half a year. This lecture series has given me an internationally-sensitive and industry-leading \*framework of language\* for discussing, journaling, and understanding culture. As someone who highly values words and their power, this is a gift that will keep giving. I'm glad to have found this.

I own the audiobook of this through audible.com. When I feel my attention has wandered, I jump back and re-listen to that section. I cannot recommend this book enough and I'm on my second listen.

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### **Anca says**

The first half of this course, the one detailing different cultural dimensions and how they apply to different contexts and cultures, was eye opening! Surprisingly, I find it provides more value in the interpersonal realm (in facilitating communication between people with different values - here, on different points of the cultural dimension scale - and in helping identify those values) than in adapting one's behavior to suit a country.

The second half, well that's another story. Here we go into evaluating different cultural clusters and positioning them on the cultural dimensions. That wouldn't be a problem if the commentary was based on research (eastern Europeans be like this, North Americans be like that) of which the institute frequently cited during the course has ample volumes of. It does become a problem when the course oversteps its bounds and tries to establish causal links between the most generic and cliché historical/economic factoids and cultural customs.

This isn't a history or economics course and it only succeeds in ruining its reputation when trying to strengthen its point by providing a why (most eastern-European cultural behavior is constantly justified as being the remnant of a nomad culture; after repeatedly stressing that culture is very persistent across

centuries and does not change with regimes, Germanic culture's close tie with Protestantism it justified by the Germans' "profound admiration for Martin Luther"; etc). The why here is ridiculously speculative and should not be featured. Instead more focus should have gone into detailing specific differences between behaviors of different cultural clusters.

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### **Larry Hansen says**

I got this audio book as part of a sale of several "Great Courses". The title did not particularly attract me so it set on the shelf for many moons. As it turns out it was a great read (listen).

Things like the "doing" vs "being" attitude are actually ingrained in many cultures whereas I thought of it as a major paradigm shift of one's nature rather than a cultural characteristic.

This course gave me a much better appreciation of the hows and whys of people outside of my culture and it is a good step toward replacing cultural arrogance/intolerance with cultural empathy.

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### **Peter says**

To be honest, I'm not THAT interested in 'customs of the world' since I don't travel nearly as much as I'd like to and when I do, I tend to pick places that aren't too unfamiliar or culturally different from my own. So I was quite surprised with how much I enjoyed this series of lectures. I learned a lot more than I expected to and found my curiosity and desire to learn more about other cultures grow as well.

I've done a few Great Courses now and while I enjoy the format, I sometimes find that the strict adherence to the number of lectures (usually 24) leads to some superfluous or 'filler' lessons. This was the first one I've done that was structured almost perfectly, with only 1 or 2 filler lectures that I can remember. The lecturers are usually very good as well, but David Livermore really knocked it out of the park with his clear annunciation and engaging discussions here.

There are 10 lectures on the various value dimensions that most cultures can be categorised into. I found these very interesting, both in a global context as well as a personal one. I often found myself thinking of where I fit on the spectrum of each dimension and which cultures I share that with. The value dimensions themselves were very intuitive and easy to understand, making the discussions on them easy to follow and understand how they apply to the various cultures around the world.

Then there were 10 lectures on the broad cultural clusters around the world like the Anglo cluster that's grouped by the predominant English language in those countries to the Confucian Asian countries which are grouped by their unique adherence to Confucian ideals. These were all also really well described and summarised while making it clear that such broad categorisations weren't perfect, but still useful in understanding the various cultures within each cluster.

I'd highly recommend this course to pretty much everyone. Most of us tend to get stuck in our own little cultural bubble, so being reminded of the huge number of possibilities and varieties out there will not only make you think more critically about your own culture but also take other people's cultures and backgrounds into greater consideration when interacting with others. Even if you're not planning on travelling abroad anytime soon, there's a lot you can take from this course and apply to your own life.



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### **Lace Lofranco says**

Many folks underestimate the importance of understanding people's cultural background - whether it be in simple interactions to complex business undertakings.

I definitely recommended this book for jet-setters, folks doing business internationally, people migrating to a different country, or even just for those living in culturally diverse community.

I like how David presented and explained in fair detail Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory along with extending it as well. While it's impossible to state every single nuance in every culture in the world, the book, though with its shortcomings, does an overall good job stating some general (along with not so obvious) things to watch out for in the world's major cultural clusters.

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### **Jessica Meyers says**

An excellent group of lectures that explains a decent amount of what you'd need to know when visiting various locations around the world. I thought Livermore did a wonderful job of presenting this material in a structured way. I thought what was discussed was very useful. I particularly liked how he related the customs to either his own experiences, experiences of people he knows, and even made up examples. These examples helped with understanding the customs even more. I definitely recommend this to everyone. Even if you rarely travel, this book will help you gain knowledge about the history, religions, and unique customs of the people in different countries from all over the world.

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### **Ammon says**

I wish I'd read (listened to) this before going to work in Latin America and Asia!

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