

The International Preferences Indicator (IPI)

WHAT is the IPI?

Building awareness of the skills required for working effectively across cultures in global operating environments is required by an ever-broader range of employees in global organizations. It is no longer only about global mobility but also about working in global teams and projects and managing people at a distance. If collaboration skills are as much about self-awareness as learning about others, we need instruments that engage learners and help them to develop more effective ways of working globally.

The International Preferences Indicator (IPI) helps people identify ways in which they can become more effective when working internationally. It consists of an online questionnaire and personal feedback report and promotes personal development through self-reflection and peer support in the context of a workshop or training-room environment. It is not only a world-class questionnaire and report, but also a workshop intervention, which helps people to learn about themselves through engaging with others.

The IPI is based on a competency set that identifies two contrasting approaches to working internationally – ‘Push’ and ‘Pull’ – and the 10 qualities that relate to these approaches. The online questionnaire takes about 15 minutes to complete, and the resulting report helps participants to reflect on their development needs when transferring their skills into unfamiliar cultural circumstances.

The IPI consists of:

- 🌀 An online, self-report questionnaire which each team member completes before a workshop
- 🌀 A Personal Feedback Report with scores and detailed analysis of the profile of each participant – which the facilitator can take to the workshop, and distribute there
- 🌀 A PowerPoint presentation for use by the facilitator in helping participants interpret and make use of their reports
- 🌀 Activity sheets and materials that engage learners, supported by a session plan that guides the facilitator through the materials
- 🌀 A Development Resources Manual to help provide ideas for personal development in areas of need

The Personal Feedback Report includes information on:

- 🌀 The 5 push and 5 pull competencies on which IPI is built, all derived from extensive research into the extra, enhanced qualities for transferring professional skills into unfamiliar cultural contexts
- 🌀 Individual scores against each of these 10 competencies, and the overall balance of push and pull energy involved
- 🌀 5 international styles that describe how you balance push and pull in handling key international challenges such as interpreting meaning, handling the unknown and retaining balance.

WHO is the IPI designed for?

The IPI is designed for all people with an international dimension to their present or future work, and who would like greater self-awareness and personal effectiveness moving forward.

It can be used for those who:

- 🌀 Have a growing requirement for international people skills to succeed in their roles
- 🌀 Want to develop their international business careers
- 🌀 Are participating in teams that need to deliver results internationally
- 🌀 Operate in multicultural workplaces
- 🌀 Need to communicate across cultures, and develop personal resources for operating outside their local operating context

The IPI is also be used as part of some business school programmes e.g. MBA or EMBA

It is not designed to be used with individuals involved in international transition. The International Profiler (TIP) – another WorldWork self-report tool – has a broader range of competencies linked to being involved in expatriation and the deeper exposure to culture involved in other forms of global mobility. TIP is also a coaching-based tool designed for debriefing in a one-to-one context rather than a workshop context.

WHAT will the IPI give you as a facilitator?

The IPI is an instrument that is designed to be as practical and user-friendly for the needs of the busy facilitator, as it is for the participant. It provides the following advantages:

- 🌀 A ready-made session on Developing Competency for Working Across Cultures that can occupy two hours to half a day as a stand-alone session or a key component on a broader programme about working globally
- 🌀 Insights into the energy and competencies required for working across cultures that are given a practical link to the professional experience of the participants
- 🌀 A script plus accompanying materials that can be followed closely step-by-step or adapted to specific needs
- 🌀 A variety of activities that draw the learning from group interaction and fun group-based activities as well as trainer input. It thus ‘keeps the energy in the room’.

WHAT are the benefits of the IPI for the organization?

The following benefits are relevant to the L&D or HR Manager, or a team/department leader who is interested in integrating the tool in a learning process:

- 🌀 Builds a better understanding of what qualities are required of professionals working internationally
- 🌀 Helps individuals to identify the gap between the demands of their role and the people skills they bring to working internationally
- 🌀 Provides the platform for a clear development plan for managing these gaps
- 🌀 Provides a support for team coaching and development when needing to deliver results in an international context
- 🌀 Gets individuals and teams to reflect on how they should respond to such challenges as avoiding misunderstandings, maintaining motivation, and dealing with the unknown when working internationally
- 🌀 Provides the above benefits in an interesting interactive session that can be delivered in a workshop

HOW has the IPI been used?

An example case:

The tool was completed on-line by 10 people who were part of a multi-cultural team in the Communication department of a large Energy company. They shared a requirement to deliver effective internal and external communication initiatives across the geographical boundaries in which the company was operating. It was felt that the individuals would benefit from greater self-awareness about the skills they bring to their communication roles, and from more understanding as to how they could develop more all-round skills moving forward. However, there had also been tensions within the team as a whole as to the degree to which press releases should be a product of consultation within different localities or created and pushed out consistently from the centre. It was thus felt appropriate to use the tool as a way of getting the team to reflect on differences in approach and build greater trust in the way that they operate moving forward. The output of the tool was explored in a half-day team-building workshop, which included the following stages:

1. Introduction to competency set: Introducing through fun, interactive activities (including use of a DVD exploration of an individual leader's style, and the use of a card game) the idea of 'push' and 'pull' approaches to working internationally, and the specific qualities associated with each approach
2. Individual feedback: Using the report as a platform for self-reflection and peer sharing around push/pull skills for working internationally, with the aim of understanding individual development needs
3. Team coaching: Sharing scores on international styles as way of understanding the different 'push' and 'pull' energies within the team, and how to resolve this more effectively in meeting the communication and collaboration challenges of the team moving forward.

The first benefit of the process was greater self-awareness at an individual level which enabled each person to think about how to reduce the gap between their own style, and the demands of their team role. Secondly, it helped the team as whole to build greater trust in each other by understanding that some of the tensions they were facing were linked to different but equally rational approaches to working internationally. It also enabled some useful discussions to be had about how to move forward in reconciling the needs for 'push out' consistent messages with the need to 'pull in' key stakeholders by creating a sense of inclusion and collaboration.