

# Communication Works

*a perfect world of words*

## Communication across Cultures



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Corporate Communication Training and Services

## Communication across Cultures

New Zealand's immigration policies have changed the cultural blue-print of our country, including our educational institutions. The cultural diversity of our colleagues, students and their caregivers, employees and stakeholders presents enormous potential, but also some challenges.

In addition to embracing our bi-cultural heritage, the New Zealand workplace has the opportunity to capitalise on the creativity, skills and resources of multi-cultural communities. However, first we need to recognise that not everyone shares the same worldview and this difference in perception influences all our workplace communication.

This session will introduce you to some tools that will enhance your cross-cultural competence in your daily exchanges with colleagues, students and their caregivers, whose first language is not English.

During this workshop:

- Recognise the New Zealand cultural worldview in your workplace.
- Discover ways in which we 'signal' culture through perception, context, language, hierarchy etc
- Discuss practical ways for saving face and promoting cross-cultural understanding in your workplace.

### Definitions

From an applied linguistics perspective, there are a number of different ways that are used to define people involved in cross-cultural interactions:

- NESB: Non-English Speaking Background.
- Native speaker: an individual who has the same language proficiency as those in the dominant culture.
- Internationals: individuals who are studying/working in an New Zealand environment but identify with a different first culture and language.
- CALD: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

### Effective communicators in any sector understand:

- it's not about you, it's about them!
- it's not just what you need to tell them, it's what they need to hear!
- it's about relationship built on empathy!
- it's about a win-win experience!
- it's about using the diverse talents of the whole team!
- it's about professionalism, credibility and walking the talk!

### Workshop challenge to you

C: consistently S: sometimes N: never

How effectively does your workplace:		C	S	N
• demonstrate a high cross-cultural awareness?	School			
	Team			
	Me			
• align with your core values/mission/vision/strategic plan etc?	Team			
	Me			

## What's happening to the cultural tapestry of Aotearoa/NZ?

National ethnic population projections indicate New Zealand's future population for four broad and overlapping ethnic groups 2013–2038.

The projections indicate a 90 percent chance that New Zealand's:

'European or Other' population (3.31 million in 2013) will increase to 3.43–3.62 million in 2025 (62%) and to 3.43–3.82 million in 2038 (56%).

Māori population (0.69 million in 2013) will increase to 0.83–0.91 million in 2025 (15%) and to 1.00–1.18 million in 2038 (17%).

Asian population (0.54 million in 2013) will increase to 0.81–0.92 million in 2025 (15%) and to 1.06–1.26 million in 2038. (18%)

Pacific population (0.34 million in 2013) will increase to 0.44–0.48 million in 2025 (8%) and to 0.54–0.65 million in 2038 (9%).

Source: Statistics New Zealand, *National Ethnic Population Projections 2013–2038*

The projections also indicate:

- The Māori, Asian, and Pacific populations will continue to grow faster than New Zealand's population overall, so will increase their share of the total population.
- The number of people identifying with Asian ethnicities is likely to exceed the number identifying with the Māori ethnicity from the mid-2020s.
- All four ethnic populations will age, with increasing numbers and proportions of their populations at the older ages.



### Cross-cultural reflection

- Consider your workplace. What type of cross-cultural misunderstandings occur and why?
- In your opinion, what are the key challenges in cross-cultural communication in your workplace?

## How's your cross-cultural competence?

Work with another course participant to choose the correct answer to the following questions.

- 1 If a Chinese person asks if your business is prosperous, it is polite to reply that it is doing:
  - i well
  - ii moderately
  - iii poorly
- 2 Which of the following gifts would a Chinese friend consider to be in bad taste?
  - i a clock
  - ii an oil painting
  - iii a cut glass vase
- 3 Which part of the body should not be exposed in a Thai home?
  - i the knees
  - ii the soles of the feet
  - iii the ankles

- 4 When you receive someone's business card in Japan, do you
- i study it carefully and put it on the table in front of you?
  - ii thank the person and put it in your pocket quickly?
  - iii look at it quickly just to memorise the name before putting it in your pocket?
- 5 When you take leave of your Japanese counterparts, do you
- i hug them and thank them warmly for their hospitality?
  - ii make a rapid departure, not knowing what to say?
  - iii bow and thank them for their hospitality?
- 6 What is the customary way of greeting in the Middle East?
- i embracing
  - ii bowing
  - iii shaking hands
- 7 Which of the following would be likely to offend your Middle Eastern host?
- i smoking a cigarette
  - ii refusing a cup of coffee
  - iii leaving some food on your plate
- 8 In Africa, when you meet someone for the first time, it is considered polite to
- i ask about the health of your host's family
  - ii talk about the weather
  - iii compliment your host on his appearance
- 9 If you are invited to a home or a school in a Buddhist country, you shouldn't
- i pat a child's head
  - ii shake a child's hand
  - iii give a child a present
- 10 If you are invited to a New Zealand friend's home for dinner, it is usual to arrive
- i well before the stated time
  - ii exactly on time
  - iii a few minutes after the stated time
- 11 In New Zealand it is not considered polite to ask your host
- i how his wife is
  - ii how much he earns
  - iii how his business is going

- 12 In Japan, if you have asked your colleague a question and they reply “maybe”, this most likely means:
- i no
  - ii yes
  - iii maybe
- 13 You have presented a gift to your Chinese homestay student’s parents, who are visiting New Zealand. They refuse, politely. Should you:
- i give up and accept they don’t want it?
  - ii tell them that it would offend you if they didn’t accept it?
  - iii continue to offer it at least three times?
- 14 You’re at a hui and your colleague is giving a presentation. There are no seats for her, so she sits on the table. This is:
- i acceptable
  - ii unacceptable
  - iii doesn’t matter

### Exercise: Cultural identity

*The number one core intercultural skill is being culturally self-aware.*

1. Culture is

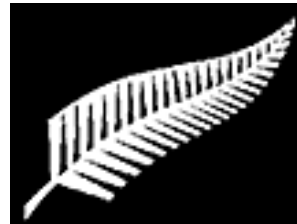
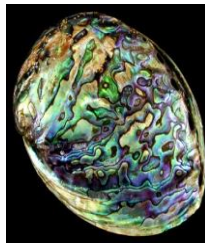
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2. Use these photos as starters to reflect on New Zealand culture:

- Identify some of the key characteristics of NZ culture.
- Consider commonly held values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours (social and business), codes of dress, languages spoken, food, religions, sport, environment and communication styles.
- What are some of the commonly held perceptions and misperceptions about NZ culture?



## What is culture?

- The lens through which we see, make sense of, and operate within the world
- Demonstrated through food, clothing, buildings, song, dance, literature, language, values, moral codes and religion, rituals: birth, marriage, death; relationship, history etc
- The software of the mind; the collective programming of the mind
- Visible culture: what we see, hear, taste, touch and feel; invisible culture: our attitudes, values, beliefs and customs.

Read the following definitions and discuss which definitions you feel are most insightful.

*Culture is a set of values, beliefs, norms, customs, rules and codes that lead people to define themselves as a distinct group, giving them a sense of commonality.*

**Source: Adler, R. B. and Elmhorst, J. M. (2002) Communicating at Work. McGraw Hill: New York, p 41.**

*Culture is the coherent, learned, shared view of a group of people about life's concerns that ranks what is important, furnishes attitudes about what things are appropriate, and dictates behaviour.*

**Source: Beamer, L. and Varner, I. (2001) Intercultural communication in the global workplace. New York: McGraw Hill, p 3.**

*Culture covers all aspects of human behaviour, but in particular, it influences our perception of the world. If you want to understand and work with people of other cultures, it is important to first know your own culture. This provides a reference point, a basis from which to be able to recognise and appreciate differences between our own and other cultures*

**Source: Chase, P., O'Rourke, S., Smith, L., Sutton, C., Timperley, T., & Wallace, C. (1998). Effective business communication in New Zealand (2nd ed.). Auckland: Longman. P.420**

*"People who feel secure in their own culture are less likely to feel threatened by other people's differences. Those who are weak in their sense of personal and cultural identity are most likely to react aggressively towards people different from themselves because they have to 'stamp out' differences they find threatening."*

**Pountney, C. (2007). Retrieved November 15, 2007, from <http://www.ecd.govt.nz/running/whiria/whiriateaomaori.pdf>**

Cultural awareness is:

- the beginning step toward understanding there is a difference between peoples, which can be attributed to their culture.

It requires:

- an understanding of the historical, political and social contexts of the individual
- that we look at our own cultural awareness and recognise whether there are any barriers that we have in our perception to others.

Typical reactions to unfamiliar cultures

- Reject difference: we insist on sameness and require people to conform to us.
- Assumptions of superiority: "Of course they're different, but we're better."
- Ethnocentrism: the belief that one's cultural norms are superior to those of other groups.
- Assumptions of universality: they may talk differently, but underneath they're just like us.

Stereotyping	The belief that a statement is true of all individuals from a particular group. Stereotyping tends to dehumanise people, boxing all members of a group into one unrealistic category. Stereotyping is one of the most common causes.
Bias	Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.
Prejudice	Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.
Discrimination	The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

**Take-out: Recognising that there are inherent differences in the way people see the world is the beginning of cultural awareness and sensitivity.**

## Qualities of New Zealand culture

Source: Falconer, T., Watson, B., and Hopner Saphiere, D. (2005) *The Kiwi Cultural Detective*

Qualities	Negatives
Modesty: one should be humble, understated and self-effacing	Dispassionate and unintentionally misleading
Restraint: reserve is not far beneath the surface - tall poppies get mowed	Conservative and overcautious
Fairness – Kiwis are highly principled and known for integrity and impartiality	Righteous and hyper-democratic
Ingenuity known for doing a lot with a little; practical and resourceful	Unprofessional; close enough is good enough
Informality: Jack's as good as his master; Kiwis favour minimum protocol; they are egalitarian, unpretentious and engaging	Disrespectful and provincial
Earthy: a pragmatic and grounded people with a common sense approach to life and deep connection to the land; sporty, outdoor lifestyle	Unsophisticated, rough-and-ready

Cultural competence is not necessarily:

### The three RS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing your culture or your values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Recognise</b> cultural differences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liking another culture or person's values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Respect</b> cultural differences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreeing with the other person's cultural values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Reconcile</b> cultural differences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing everything about another culture</li> </ul>	

Source: Waitamata District Health Board (2010) : *Toolkit for Staff Working in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Environment*

**Take-out: Culture gives us the unwritten rules of social interaction in every context. Our culture influences all aspects of our worldview: our perception and our self-concept.**



## It starts with perception

*'We don't see things the way they are. We see them the way we are.'*

Anaïs Nin

Perception is our worldview. A number of factors contribute to how we form our perceptions. These include:

- cultural background and language
- gender and generation
- experience and expectations
- communication competence and style: education, self-awareness
- emotional intelligence
- feelings, attitudes and values
- self-image: the way we see ourselves

Perceptions about your organisation are created prior to any interaction and are based on what stakeholders:

- observe, read, hear, know from others and most importantly **experience**.

Perception is a key aspect of:

- delivering an excellent cross-cultural experience and creating a positive workplace culture
- dealing with and resolving cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Senders and receivers frequently have different perceptions of the same word, situation, or action, which may be equally valid; understanding this can be the difference between effective communication and misunderstanding. This is especially the case when dealing with stakeholders who do not have English as a first language or have a different culture from us.

*To understand the man, you must walk a mile in his moccasin.*

*North American First Nations Proverb*

### What does this mean for us?

- It means that what we say isn't necessarily what other people 'hear' because they **interpret** what we say through their cultural filter.
- It means that we need to be aware about **what** we say, **how** we say it and **the effect that it will have on other people**.
- It means that each person has different and **equally valid perceptions**.

### How can we improve our perception skills?

- Be **empathetic** – put yourself in somebody else's shoes, **listen** carefully and ask yourself how you would feel in a similar situation.
- Have a **high level of self awareness** – know how other people perceive you and learn to be aware of your thinking and the biases it contains.
- Be aware of stereotyping.
- **Encourage feedback** to check that your perception is accurate.

**Take out: Perception is everything! Difference in perception is one of the greatest barriers to effective cross-cultural communication and excellent customer service.**

## Empathy

*“Empathy is suspending our preoccupation with ourselves and entering the experience of the other person.”* Source: Nichols, M.N. (1995). *The lost art of listening: How learning to listen can improve relationships*. New York: The Guilford Press

Empathy improves our perception radar and is a critical part of emotional intelligence: our ability to understand and manage our emotions and read the emotions and cues behind others’ messages.

Speaker A (Chinese-born NZ citizen): *I find it embarrassing when colleagues make jokes about Asian drivers.*

Co-worker (NZ-born European): *It’s just the Kiwi sense of humour mate. Build a bridge! As they say ...when in Rome ..*

Draft a more empathetic response

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## Mindset challenge

The **challenge** is that we really need to:

- understand the ways our own culture influences our perceptions and the core differences which exist compared with the other culture(s)
- develop a real awareness of differences in communication styles, intentions and interpretations – verbal, non-verbal and interpersonal
- demonstrate a real empathy for the other culture(s) and accept that there are other successful ways of doing things – from conducting a negotiation to holding a meeting/hui
- avoid making assumptions and, where we are unsure, check out the intended meaning with the person from the other culture.

## Use a cross-cultural passport: Seek first to understand, then to be understood

Our cultural filter influences our perceptions according to our cultural worldview. The assumptions that we make and our expectations of others’ behaviour is affected by our cultural filter.

Different cultural groups have different rules and values for:

- humour
- courtesies in speech, such as when to say ‘please’, ‘thank you’ or ‘excuse me’
- the meaning of ‘yes’ and ‘no’
- rules of politeness
- directness, context and face-saving
- decision-making
- leadership
- deference to others, and gender roles
- the rights and obligations of the group and the individual

- non-verbal communication
- use of time
- conflict management
- others?

**Take-out: Use your cross-cultural passport – seek first to understand and then to be understood!**

## Language

“The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

**Finding shared meaning across different languages is a challenge.**

The Treaty of Waitangi Tiriti o Waitangi <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/treaty-of-waitangi>

The Treaty in Māori was deemed to convey the meaning of the English version, but there are important differences. Most significantly, the word ‘**sovereignty**’ was translated as ‘**kawanatanga**’ (governance). Some Māori believed they were giving up government over their lands but retaining the right to manage their own affairs. The English version guaranteed ‘undisturbed possession’ of all their ‘properties’, but the Māori version guaranteed ‘**tino rangatiratanga**’ (full authority) over ‘**taonga**’ (treasures, which may be intangible). Māori understanding was at odds with the understanding of those negotiating the Treaty for the Crown, and as Māori society valued the spoken word, explanations given at the time were probably as important as the wording of the document.

### Key take-out

Never ask your culturally and linguistically diverse colleague/student/stakeholder: **Do you understand?** Why?

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### Reframe how you give and seek feedback

Assist your receiver by integrating the definition

So that you prevent the receiver having to ask you what an idiom or specialised piece of jargon is, it is helpful to define a difficult word or idiom that you are using in your own question or statement.

*“We really need to lift our game team **(by that, I mean that we need to stop losing productivity hours because we haven’t planned our maintenance more carefully.**”*

### Benefit:

- The receiver will really appreciate your sensitivity to the fact that he/she may not know this concept, word, idiom, colloquialism etc. You will have saved potential embarrassment for the receiver and accrued goodwill for yourself your organisation.

You need to explain these phrasal verbs to your international students/colleagues, what do you say?

To hold the fort	
To be as good as gold	
To have gone pear shaped	
To lose the plot	
To pull your socks up	
Going forward	

### What's in the subtext?

What we say in English	What we mean	What others hear
I hear what you say	I disagree and do not want to discuss it any further	He/she accepts my point of view
With the greatest respect	I think that you are an idiot	He/she is listening to me
That's not bad	That's good	That's poor
That is a very brave proposal	You are insane	He thinks I have courage
Quite good	A bit disappointing	Quite good
Very interesting	That is clearly nonsense	They are impressed
Could we consider some other options?	I don't like your idea	They have not yet decided
You must come for dinner/ We must catch up sometime	It's not an invitation; I'm just being polite	I will get an invitation soon

Adapted from Kwintessential: Cultural Awareness Manual ([www.kwintessential.co.uk](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk))

### Tone

Chinese speakers sometimes struggle with the English construction that conveys a polite tone. This is because in their language politeness is conveyed by a different part of speech.

Modals (can/could, may/might/must, will/would, shall/should) which are auxiliary verbs that convey likelihood, ability, permission and obligation do not readily translate to every other language. For example, Chinese speakers can seem abrupt when they don't use the modals and associated patterns.

Please read this article.	You may like to read this article.
You come and sit here please.	Would you come and sit here please? Would you mind coming and sitting here please?

## **Accent and less proficient spoken English**

Most of us prefer not to be seen as ‘foolish’ or ‘ignorant’ especially in a workplace or learning interaction.

- Don’t judge; put yourself in the international’s position, demonstrate empathy and reassure to develop rapport and save face!
- It takes a lifetime to become proficient in another language; some of us never get there but it doesn’t mean that our listening comprehension is not very good or that we do not understand.
- Instead of ‘deficit’ English – understand why the speaker’s English is ‘different’.

When the non-English background speaker is obviously not understanding a dialogue, reassure the speaker that this is normal. Embarrassment for both you and the other speaker will interrupt the comprehension process. If necessary, try to shoulder responsibility for the communication breakdown.

Eg “I am sorry that I cannot speak your language ... ”

This demonstrates empathy and is rapport building and saves face. Again this statement garners goodwill. Remember, it takes many years, some might say a lifetime, to acquire native-speaker proficiency.

Reassure the non-English speaker that you are both in a ‘learning’ context, and that you will reach understanding with a little persistence.

Speak in a way that is:

- slightly slower than normal
- as natural as possible
- in grammatically correct English.

## **Signpost important information (Feed forward)**

Indicate that you are going to share some important information.

“This is the most important thing to understand ...” “You really need to understand this ...”

## **Use Another Channel**

- Support your oral message with key points in written form. Explain that this is normal practice. If you acknowledge the difficulties of cross-cultural interactions especially with linguistic comprehension, you help to relax the speaker.
- Let the student/colleague/stakeholder read the information first.
- Set the context, by checking shared understandings, and bridging the gaps that you detect.
- There may still be misunderstanding. You may need to give the receiver time to process the information, especially if it’s bad news.
- Use an email to confirm the information that you have conveyed via the oral verbal channel.

## **Use a Monolingual English Dictionary**

Use and have at hand a monolingual dictionary. The Collins Co-Build is a very useful version. Advocate that your non-English speaking students and colleagues use this type of dictionary to extend their vocabulary and comprehension.

## Greetings

- Draw a line to connect the term and the meaning

Kia ora	Hello in Chinese
Morena	Informal greeting in Maori – hello/thank you
Tēnā kourua	Come here and welcome in Maori
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou kātoa	Hello in Japanese
Haere mai	An ancient Sanskrit greeting
Namaste	Hello in Samoan
Ni hao	Formal greeting in Maori: Greetings, hello to two people
Konnichiwa	Good morning in Maori
Tālofa	Formal greeting in Maori: Greetings, hello to three people or more

## Reflect on your non-verbal communication

Differences in perception of cross-cultural, non-verbal communication are striking and can contribute to communication breakdown.

<b>Comparison of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication</b>	
<b>Message Impact</b>	<b>Type of Communication</b>
	Words
	Tone of voice and inflection (paralanguage – use of the voice)
	Facial expression, body posture and gestures

**Source: Albert Mehrabian (1971)**

### Chinese non-verbal communication

- Frowning while someone is speaking is interpreted as a sign of disagreement. Therefore, most Chinese maintain an impassive expression when speaking.
- It is considered disrespectful to stare into another person's eyes. In crowded situations the Chinese avoid eye contact to give themselves privacy.

### Māori and Pasifika cultures

- Direct eye contact is considered aggressive. Look down to avoid appearing confrontational.

### Western culture

- Eyes are the window of the soul
- “Look at me when I’m talking to you!”

## Context and face-saving

- **Context:** the amount of information about a situation or setting that is assumed as understood.
- **Face-saving:**
  - preventing embarrassment to one's self and others
  - 'the act of preserving one's status and outward dignity' (Victor, 1992).

The more highly contexted the culture is, the more importance its members attach to face-saving (Victor: 160).

High context	Low context
The more highly contexted, more importance members attach to face-saving	Less importance attached to face-saving
Weak emphasis on written word	Strong emphasis on written word
Indirect style of communication	Direct style of communication
Flexible adherence to the law	Rigid adherence to the law
Binding agreements based on personal promises	Agreements based on personal promises less binding
Agreements based on written word (contracts) not binding	Agreements based on written word (contracts) are binding
Hierarchy and position are important	Egalitarian principles apply to workplace
Kin and family relationships take precedence over other responsibilities and workplace obligations	Work and family are separate

### Power distance

- Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of society accept inequality in power and status as normal.

### Individualism versus collectivism

- Individualism refers to the extent to which cultures differ on the bipolar individualism/collectivism continuum.
- Individualist cultures assume that people will primarily look after their own interests and the interests of their immediate family.
- In contrast, people in collectivist cultures belong to tight 'in-groups' (extended family/whanau, iwi/clan or organisation) which protect the interests of members, but expect unquestioning loyalty in return.
- Individualist cultures (High - Australia, UK, Canada, New Zealand) tend to encourage members to be assertive in their communication styles, to readily express their thoughts and opinions, and to question teachers in the school room or employers in the workplace.

## REBELS

Source: Hawken, S.J., Fox, R., van den Brink, R., & Moir, F. (2008) An approach to communication challenges in the consultation. *NZFP*, 35(4), 274–277.

**R – Recognise** there is a problem

**E – Express Empathy**

**B – Establish the Boundaries on New Zealand culture’s policies and practices and your organisation’s codes**

**E – Emphasise** the other’s best interests

**L – Use inclusive Language**

**S – Focus on Solutions**

## Tips for communicating with people from other cultures

1. Seek first to understand, then be understood. Use empathy to put yourself in the others’ shoes/life position. Be professional and ensure that your behaviour aligns with your organisation’s mission and core values.
2. Avoid making assumptions and suspend judgement; look for the reason behind the culturally and linguistically diverse person’s attitudes and behaviour.
3. Find out as much as you can about the other’s cultural values and practices. Incorporate greetings in the student’s/colleague’s/stakeholder’s first language; show interest in building relationship in culturally appropriate ways.
4. Consider whether their culture is high or low-context, high or low PD, collectivist or individualistic?
5. Avoid using slang, colloquialisms and idioms without explaining what you mean. Incorporate the definition in the explanation.
6. Speak slowly and clearly. Write down an instruction. Draw a picture. Use a smart phone translator or a monolingual dictionary. Find the bridge to shared understanding.
7. Use the three Rs. Listen with your ears and your eyes: summarise and paraphrase to check that you have got the message as the sender intended.
8. Never ask a person whose first language is not English: Do you understand?
9. Seek win-win solutions when you have a cross-cultural misunderstanding.
10. Use the REBELS model to negotiate an agreement.



## Reflection

- What key aspect will you take away from today’s workshop?

## Resources

- Waitamata District Health Board (2010) : *Toolkit for Staff Working in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Environment*
- Magee, J (Ed)(2011) *New to New Zealand: Ethnic communities in Aotearoa – a Handbook*, Hamilton: Ethnic New Zealand Trust
- <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk>
- <http://geert-hofstede.com>
- <http://www.maorilanguage.net/maori-words-and-phrases/>



## Notes

