

CULTIVATING CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN INDIA



2025

Download this report





YOUR TRUSTED PARTNER IN INDIA

M+V Altios empowers foreign subsidiaries to operate, scale, and succeed in India.

We deliver strategic guidance and hands-on support across compliance, people, and operations, helping you turn challenges into long-term growth.

1500+

Project Executed in India
Since **2000**

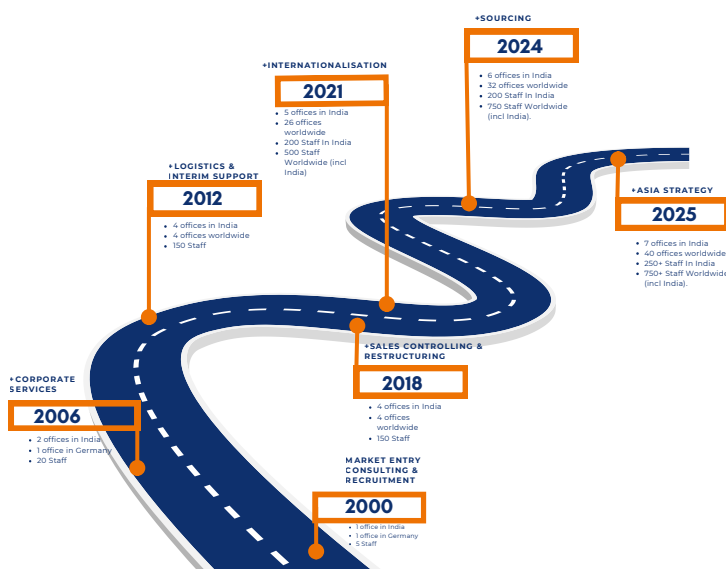
- ▶ **MARKET GROWTH**
- ▶ **ORGANIC GROWTH**
- ▶ **ACCELERATED GROWTH**



Contact us for support with
your venture in India

HELPING FIRMS SUCCEED IN INDIA

Maier+Vidorno is an Altios group subsidiary dedicated to entering and growing in the complex Indian market, with over 250 employees supporting clients from seven branches.



CONTENT

Foreword	4
Bilateral Insights	5
Expert Note	6
Banking Insights	9
Executive Summary	10
Introduction	12
Cultural Competence	13
Cultural Overview	14
Friction Challenges	18
Building Strategies	21
Tools & Frameworks	23
Recommendations	25
Conclusion	26

FOREWORD



KLAUS MAIER



OSCAR ESTEBAN



MANUEL MORENO

In today's interconnected world, business success is no longer determined solely by product quality, market access, or financial strength. Increasingly, it depends on our ability to collaborate effectively across cultures. Nowhere is this more relevant than in the relationship between **Spain and India - two vibrant economies** with deep complementarities but also very different ways of working.

The **Indo-Spanish Chamber of Commerce (ISCC)** has long recognised that cultural understanding is not a “soft skill” but a critical enabler of trust, efficiency, and growth. **Over 280 Spanish companies operate in India**, particularly in the metallurgical industries, renewable energy, automotive, ceramics, and infrastructure (highways, transmission lines, tunnels, and metro stations).

Spanish companies operating in India, whether new entrants or long-established players, consistently face challenges around communication, hierarchy, time orientation, and **leadership expectations**. Yet these challenges, when approached with openness and the right tools, can transform into opportunities for innovation and stronger partnerships.

This report, **Cultivating Cross-Cultural Competence**, draws on practical frameworks, case studies, and most importantly, insights from 50+ Spanish Companies through online and in-person interviews out of the total 80+ member companies. It reflects the real experiences of companies navigating **Indo-Spanish collaboration** on the ground. By highlighting not only the differences but also pathways to bridge them, we aim to equip Spanish leaders with practical strategies for **building resilient, high-performing teams in India**.

We believe that cultivating cross-cultural competence must be an ongoing journey-embedded into **organisational practices**, leadership styles, and individual mindsets. With curiosity, empathy, and structured approaches, Spanish companies can turn cultural diversity into a genuine competitive advantage.

We are honoured to present this report as a joint effort of ISCC and M+V Altios, proudly co-sponsored by Kotak Mahindra Bank, reaffirming our shared commitment to helping businesses succeed in India and beyond.

Yours Sincerely,

Klaus Maier

/Group Managing
Partner
/M+V Altios

Oscar Esteban

/President
/Indo-Spanish Chamber
of Commerce

Manuel Moreno

/Managing Partner, Spain & Portugal
Office
/Altios International



BILATERAL INSIGHTS



LUCIA PATERNINA

In an international context marked by uncertainty and rising trade tensions, the risk of fragmentation of the global economy is becoming increasingly evident, with potentially adverse effects on global value chains, growth, and trade flows. In the face of these challenges, consolidating long-term strategic alliances emerges as an essential tool to overcome barriers and seize opportunities.

Within this framework, India stands out as a priority partner for Spain. The scale and prospects of its economy, together with the numerous opportunities for cooperation across sectors of mutual interest, position the bilateral relationship as a cornerstone of Spain's economic engagement in Asia. The dynamism of bilateral trade further confirms this: India is already Spain's second largest trading partner in Asia and the third largest destination for our exports in the region. In 2024, bilateral exchanges in goods and services exceeded €9.665 billion, representing a cumulative growth of 52% since 2021. The complementarity of both economies and their shared resilience in the face of global challenges attest to the strength and potential of this deepening partnership.

Moreover, there has been a notable increase in investment relations. More than 280 Spanish companies are now established in India, and accumulated investment reached €1.819 billion in 2023, a 46% increase in just two years. This growing presence reflects a firm, strategic commitment by Spanish companies to the Indian market, leading to long-term projects that are frequently carried out in close collaboration with local partners, contributing to industrial development and the creation of skilled employment in the country.

Bilateral economic cooperation goes beyond figures and trade flows; it is also built on mutual understanding and respect for the cultural differences that shape our ways of doing business. As this study highlights, the contrast between Spanish business practices and India's diverse and dynamic corporate culture should not be seen as a challenge, but as an extraordinary source of enrichment. Embracing and managing these particularities opens doors to deeper dialogue, strengthens mutual trust, and paves the way for the internationalisation of Spanish companies. Above all, it fosters joint projects capable of responding with creativity and ambition to the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interconnected and demanding global economy.

This study is a valuable contribution to strengthening the economic ties between Spain and India. We warmly thank the Indo Spanish Chamber of Commerce and Maier+Vidorno ALTIOS for their effort and dedication, which will undoubtedly help prepare the ground for closer, more enduring, and more strategic cooperation between Spain and India.

Ms. Lucia Paternina

/Chief Economic & Commercial Counsellor

/Embassy of Spain



EXPERT NOTE



MANISH DWIVEDI

From the perspective of Indian managers working within Spanish companies, cultural differences are not theoretical; they are lived realities that shape how teams communicate, collaborate, and deliver results. Spanish organisations bring professionalism, technical depth, and **a strong ethos of work-life balance**. Yet when these practices intersect with India's hierarchical traditions, flexible time orientation, and **relationship-driven work culture**, gaps emerge that require careful navigation.

The findings from the Indo-Spanish context underscore these challenges. Indian managers frequently report friction around **leadership and hierarchy**. Spanish leaders tend to expect initiative and autonomy, while Indian teams often seek directive guidance and closer managerial involvement. Communication differences also stand out: Spanish professionals value directness, while Indian colleagues rely on diplomacy and indirect cues to preserve harmony. Without cultural awareness, these differences can quickly erode trust and efficiency.

At the same time, there is optimism. Indian leaders consistently observe that Spanish companies that succeed in India take deliberate steps to adapt to the local market. The most effective organisations do three things well:

- Adapt leadership practices** – blending Spanish openness with sensitivity to India's respect for authority
- Clarify expectations early** – especially around deadlines, roles, and feedback to prevent misalignment
- Invest in cultural learning** – ensuring training is not limited to Indian staff but extends equally to Spanish managers leading Indian teams

Ultimately, cultural competence is a two-way street. Spanish companies that listen actively to their Indian managers and act on their insights not only build trust faster but also enhance retention and long-term performance. The goal is not assimilation into one culture, but the creation of a hybrid model where Spanish directness and Indian adaptability complement each other. When managed with empathy and intent, these differences transform from sources of friction into drivers of innovation and synergy.

Manish Dwivedi

/Assistant General Manager Human Resources
/Maier Vidorno Altios
/m.dwivedi@mv-altios.com



EXPERT NOTE



KASIA DZWONNIK

For Spanish companies operating in India, achieving commercial success is not solely dependent on **market access, pricing, or product quality**. Our experience - and the voices of Spanish firms already established here - show that cultural agility is as critical as **business strategy**.

Cross-cultural differences do not always appear in strategic plans, but they are felt every day in meetings, negotiations, and team dynamics. Many Spanish managers, for example, expect open debate and direct feedback, while their Indian counterparts often communicate more indirectly out of respect and harmony. Without **mutual understanding**, these differences can create delays, tension, or reduced team morale.

The ISCC member survey confirms this: **74% of Spanish respondents identified communication style as the main source of friction, and 46% pointed to challenges around punctuality and deadline discipline. At the same time, over 65% expressed confidence that clear communication protocols and structured training would significantly improve collaboration.** These numbers underline what companies are already experiencing in practice.

Spanish firms that have adapted successfully in India share a common approach: they invest early in structured onboarding, cross-cultural mentoring, and leadership coaching.

Simple tools-such as agreeing on definitions of deadlines or clarifying communication protocols-have proven to prevent misunderstandings that might otherwise escalate. Embedding these practices into HR systems and leadership routines ensures they become sustainable rather than short-lived fixes.

*The lesson is clear: for Spanish companies, cultural competence in India is not just about avoiding mistakes-it is a **strategic enabler**. Those who integrate it systematically into their people practices enjoy higher engagement, stronger partnerships, and long-term competitive advantage in this complex and promising market.*



Kasia Dzwonnik

/Business Developer

/Altios, Spain

/k.dzwonnik@altios.com

Think India *Think Kotak*

India's leading bank for global businesses



Market cap
€42.78 Bn*



Capital adequacy ratio
23.7%*



Net worth
€16.40 Bn**

Empowering Multinationals with Trusted Financial Solutions



Lending
solutions



FDI-related
regulatory
advisory



GIFT city
offerings



Digital trade &
payment
portal - fyn



Employee
banking
solutions

✉ **Gitanjali Seth, Vice President** gitanjali.seth@kotak.com

☎ **+91 9999309099**

*For Kotak Group consolidated **EURINR 100.52 as of 30th June 2025

BANKING INSIGHT



VISHAL SACHDEVA

Empowering Spanish Subsidiaries with Smart Banking Solutions

Spanish companies are increasingly looking to expand their footprint globally, and India is a key growth market posting **GDP growth upwards of 6% year-on-year**. The Indian market, with its vibrant economy and diverse opportunities, offers immense potential for Spanish subsidiaries. In the journey of internationalisation, the choice of a strong banking partner is one of the first few steps. At Kotak Mahindra Bank, we specialise in providing **smart banking solutions** that empower Spanish businesses to establish, grow, and thrive in India.

Our dedicated corporate banking teams bring deep market knowledge and hands-on experience in facilitating smooth India entry. FEMA Desk at Kotak facilitates statutory approvals for setting up liaison, branch, or project offices, structures inward investments, and enables **FDI and ECB flows** and respective filings. This ensures Spanish subsidiaries can focus on business expansion in India.

Beyond market entry, Kotak Bank enables Spanish companies to optimise and grow their operations through a full suite of solutions, including working capital lending, term lending, project finance, cash management, supply chain financing, employee banking solutions, and escrow services [among others]-designed to enhance liquidity, improve efficiency, and strengthen vendor and dealer relationships. Kotak Bank supports statutory payments like GST, TDS, customs duty, and utility bills with direct integration with tax portals.

As companies grow and mature further, Kotak franchise offers IPO advisory and M&A support, ensuring Spanish companies are well-positioned to leverage India's expanding capital markets.

At **Kotak Mahindra Bank**, we go beyond banking by offering knowledge-driven sessions and personalised solutions that align with the long-term ambitions of Spanish enterprises in India. With a strong focus on service excellence, Kotak is not just a financial institution, but a strategic partner committed to enabling global success.

"Think India. Think Kotak".

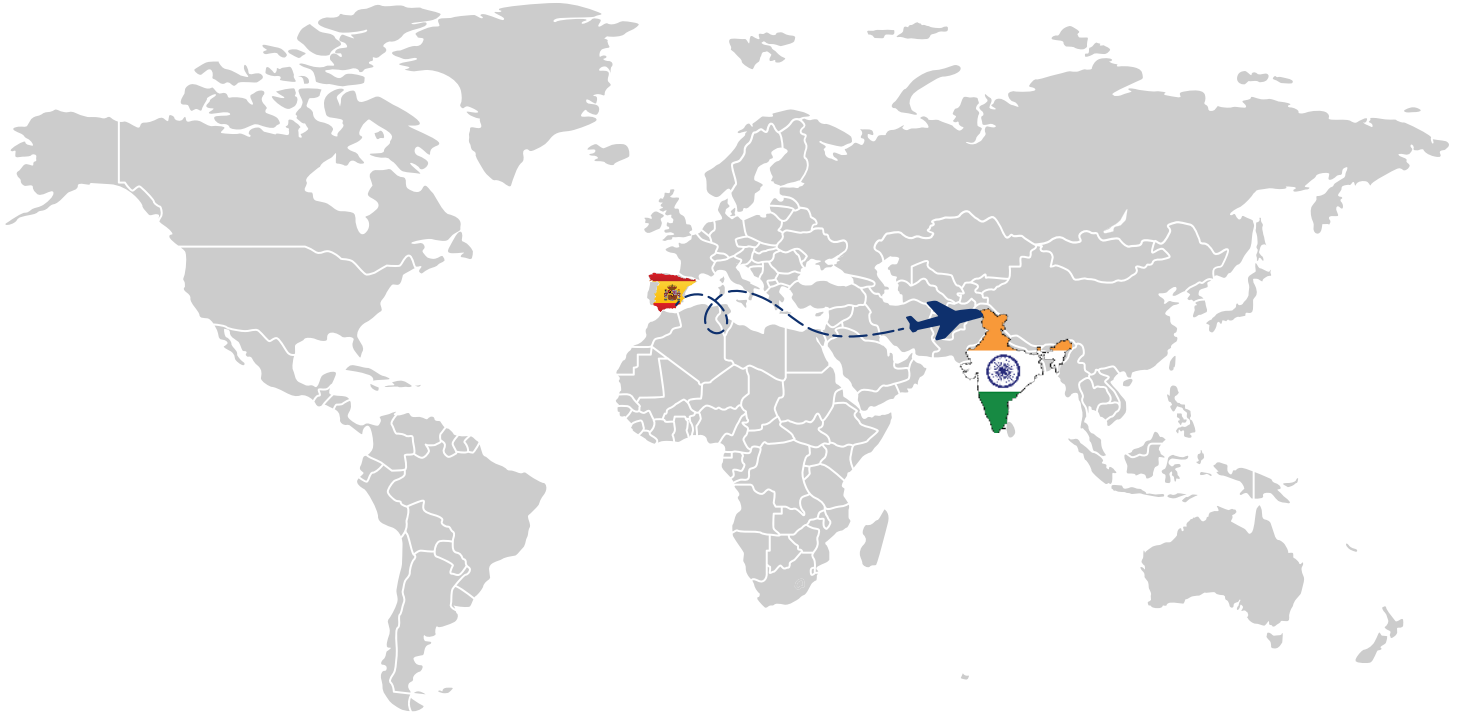
Vishal Sachdeva

/Business Head- Multinationals & New Age Banking
/Kotak Mahindra Bank
/vishal.sachdeva@kotak.com

*T&C apply as Credit at sole discretion of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd and subject to guidelines issued by RBI from time to time



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In an era where businesses are increasingly operating across borders, cross-cultural competence has emerged as a crucial capability for organisations striving for growth, innovation, and operational harmony. As Indian and Spanish professionals collaborate more frequently - whether through joint ventures, shared service centres, or multinational teams ability to understand and navigate cultural differences is no longer optional; it is a business necessity.

/ Key findings from this report highlight that:

/ **Indian workplaces** are characterised by high respect for hierarchy, indirect communication, flexible time orientation, and a collectivist mindset. Professional interactions often blend formality with relational depth, and authority figures are expected to provide clear direction.

/ **Spanish workplaces**, in contrast, emphasise more egalitarian relationships, direct and expressive communication, time discipline, and individual autonomy. Spanish professionals value open discussion, quick feedback loops, and a strong balance between work and personal life.

These cultural contrasts can lead to misunderstandings, delays, and interpersonal friction if not proactively addressed.



"If Spanish companies need to be successful there should be multi understanding - about people, product & market."

Rakesh C Patel - CEO & Managing Director, Fagor Control Systems Pvt. Ltd.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



To bridge these gaps and create a cohesive, high-functioning work environment, the report outlines a set of actionable recommendations:

- / At the organisational level, initiate cultural sensitivity programs, integrate diverse leadership, and design inclusive policies that accommodate both cultures' values and expectations.
- / At the managerial level, encourage adaptive leadership styles, clarify performance expectations, and foster psychologically safe spaces for open cross-cultural dialogue.
- / At the individual level, develop cultural intelligence, encourage empathy, and provide mentoring opportunities across cultures to build mutual understanding and trust.



"Spanish companies that thrive in India are those that treat culture as a strategic priority, not an afterthought. By investing in awareness and alignment from the beginning, they unlock the real potential of Indo-Spanish partnerships"

Praveen Singhal, Managing Director (India), Maier Vidorno Altios

Ultimately, this report positions cross-cultural competence not just as a way to manage differences but as a strategic enabler for creating synergy, boosting employee engagement, and enhancing overall business effectiveness. By embracing the richness of both Indian and Spanish cultures and cultivating mindful collaboration, organisations can unlock new levels of innovation, cohesion, and performance in an increasingly interconnected world.

INTRODUCTION

In today's hyperconnected and globalised economy, organisations are increasingly operating across borders, cultures, and time zones. Multinational companies are no longer the exception—they are the norm. As a result, teams comprising professionals from different cultural backgrounds are becoming more prevalent, requiring new skills and sensitivities for successful collaboration and organisational cohesion.

As such, cross-cultural competence ability to understand, respect, and adapt to different cultural norms and values, is not just a key differentiator. It is a critical business capability. Without it, well-intentioned global partnerships can become plagued by miscommunications, reduced productivity, employee disengagement, and even failed projects. On the other hand, when cultural competence is cultivated, it fosters trust, innovation, and seamless collaboration, unlocking the full potential of multicultural teams.



"Open communication and a willingness to adapt have allowed us to work seamlessly across cultural differences, setting the foundation for long-term success."

Sheetal Malik, Country Head, Comansa India

/ Objectives of the Report

This report has been developed with a strategic intent to enhance cross-cultural understanding and improve organisational effectiveness between Indian and Spanish professionals. The core objectives are as follows:

- / To Understand and Compare Indian and Spanish Work Cultures
- / To Identify Potential Friction Points in Collaboration
- / To Recommend Strategies for Effective Cross-Cultural Management

In essence, this report aims to serve as a practical guide and strategic resource for organisations looking to create high-performing, culturally intelligent teams that operate seamlessly across Indian and Spanish contexts. It reflects a deep commitment to promoting cultural harmony, enhancing mutual respect, and driving global collaboration success.



"Building trust between Spanish leaders and Indian teams requires more than processes—it demands empathy and cultural alignment. HR's role is to translate these differences into strengths, enabling collaboration that lasts."

Dhruv Thakur, VP - Legal & HR, Maier Vidorno Altios



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

UNDERSTANDING CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE



The Business Payoff

- / Resilience → Teams adapt smoothly to uncertainty.
- / Innovation → Diversity of thought sparks creative solutions.
- / Partnership Strength → Trust grows, enabling long-term success.

Why It Matters?

- / Clear Communication → Reduces confusion and speeds decisions.
- / Aligned Priorities → Ensures both cultures work toward common goals.
- / Sustainable Growth → Builds strong foundations for expansion.

Strategic Outcomes

- / Employee Engagement → Teams feel respected and valued.
- / Operational Efficiency → Less friction, smoother workflows.
- / Competitive Edge → Cultural agility sets companies apart.

From Challenge to Advantage

- / Friction → Flow → Misunderstandings become opportunities.
- / Delays → Discipline → Time differences turn into balance.
- / Diversity → Synergy → Differences strengthen collaboration.

The Cultural Dividend

- / Innovation Return → Fresh perspectives fuel creativity.
- / Collaboration Value → Stronger teamwork across borders.
- / Performance Gain → Higher efficiency and business results.

For Spanish companies operating in India or preparing to enter, the ability to bridge cultural differences is a strategic advantage. Cross-cultural competence is more than a “**soft skill**”; it directly influences how effectively teams communicate, align on priorities, and deliver on commitments.

Many of the challenges Spanish leaders face in India - unclear feedback, differing attitudes to hierarchy, or flexible views on time - are not about capability but culture. Without awareness, these differences can lead to delays, frustration, and lost opportunities. With competence, they create **resilience, innovation, and stronger business partnerships**.

Cross-cultural competence involves five key elements:

- Self-awareness: recognising how Spanish directness or flat hierarchies may be interpreted in India.
- Cultural knowledge: understanding Indian norms on hierarchy, communication, and time.
- Empathy: seeing issues from the perspective of colleagues and partners.
- Adaptability: adjusting leadership, communication, and deadlines without losing clarity.
- Communication agility: knowing when to be direct and when to prioritise harmony.

For Spanish leaders, cultivating these skills ensures smoother collaboration, reduces miscommunication, and strengthens trust. Done well, it allows both Spanish clarity and Indian flexibility to work in synergy-turning cultural diversity into a long-term business strength.



“By prioritizing clarity in communication and fostering partnerships that go beyond borders, we are ensuring cultural harmony and shared growth across regions.”

Carlos Ferrer, International Business Director, Laboratorios Kin



CULTURAL OVERVIEW

COMPARATIVE CULTURAL OVERVIEW: INDIA & SPAIN

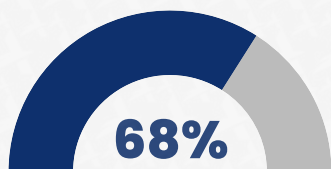
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Analysis

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework offers a powerful lens through which we can understand and compare the underlying values that shape behaviours in different societies. By analysing India and Spain through this model, we gain clarity on how their cultural orientations influence workplace norms, leadership styles, communication preferences, and decision-making approaches.

The following comparison uses six key Hofstede dimensions to highlight core differences between Indian and Spanish work cultures and provides practical implications for managing and collaborating across these cultures.

Dimension	India	Spain	Collaboration Implication
Power Distance	High — clear hierarchy	Medium — flatter access to leaders	Define decision rights and voice up front; invite questions explicitly.
Individualism	Collectivist tendencies	Individualist	Balance team consensus with personal accountability.
Masculinity/Femininity	More competitive/achievement	More relationship/quality of life	Align on urgency vs well-being; make trade-offs explicit.
Uncertainty Avoidance	Moderate — adaptable	High — prefer structure	Pair flexibility with clear process & risk gates.
Long-Term Orientation	Long-term/patient	Shorter-term/results	Set both quick wins and end-state milestones.
Indulgence	Restrained	Indulgent	Normalise leisure/time-off expectations early.

The Hofstede framework reveals deep-rooted value differences that influence how Indian and Spanish professionals think, behave, and work. However, these differences are not barriers - they are opportunities. When understood and acknowledged, they offer powerful insights into building trust-based, adaptive, and culturally intelligent teams. Rather than attempting to erase cultural distinctions, organisations should strive to bridge them with curiosity, empathy, and shared norms tailored to the hybrid work environment.



Data Point: 68% of surveyed members reported friction due to direct vs. indirect communication styles, making this the single most cited source of cultural misunderstanding.



CULTURAL OVERVIEW

While the Hofstede framework highlights structural cultural differences between India and Spain, these dimensions come to life only when observed in everyday workplace interactions. Numbers and charts explain why behaviours differ, but stories and experiences reveal how those differences impact collaboration.

Case studies help connect abstract cultural dimensions - such as power distance, individualism, and communication style - to real situations faced by Indo-Spanish teams. They demonstrate that cultural clashes are not signs of incompatibility, but opportunities to design smarter, more adaptive ways of working together.



CASE STUDY: WHEN DIRECTNESS FEELS LIKE DISRESPECT

Context:

A Spanish project manager, Elena, was leading a weekly review call with her counterparts in India. She provided candid feedback to the Indian development team, stating: "This report doesn't meet the standard. Please redo it by tomorrow." The Indian team, particularly the lead, Raghav, felt taken aback. They perceived Elena's tone as rude and dismissive. After the call, team morale dropped, and participation in subsequent meetings became passive.

What Happened:

In Spanish business culture, directness is highly valued for its clarity and efficiency, particularly in time-sensitive projects. In contrast, Indian professionals often prefer a more indirect and face-saving approach to feedback, where the tone is softened to maintain harmony.

Resolution:

An internal HR intercultural coach stepped in to mediate. Elena learned to preface feedback with context and appreciation (e.g., "Thanks for the effort so far. However, this section may need improvement."). Raghav's team was also sensitised to understand that directness does not equate to disrespect in Spanish work culture.

Key Takeaway:

Cultural decoding of intent is essential. Training in "intent vs impact" can help both sides avoid misjudgment and foster constructive feedback loops.



"Working together across Spanish and Indian teams has been highly rewarding. Minor cultural differences exist, but our efforts in strengthening communication continue to create a positive workplace."

Ricardo Gallego, Country Manager India, Gescrap India Pvt Ltd



CULTURAL OVERVIEW

KEY WORKPLACE DIFFERENCES: INDIA & SPAIN

While both India and Spain are rich in heritage and value interpersonal relationships, their workplace norms differ significantly in how authority is exercised, how time is managed, how people communicate, and how conflict or decisions are handled. These differences, if not understood and managed, can lead to misalignment, friction, or inefficiency in multicultural teams.

The following table outlines the key contrasts across six core workplace aspects, followed by detailed explanations of each:

Dimension	India	Spain	Implications for Indo-Spanish Teams
Hierarchy	Hierarchical and status-conscious; authority rarely questioned; titles and seniority matter.	Flatter structures; leaders are approachable and collaborative.	Indians may hesitate to challenge authority; Spaniards expect open dialogue. Leaders must set clear norms.
Time Orientation	Polychronic; flexible with deadlines, multitasking common; relationships can override schedules.	Monochronic; value punctuality, planning, and respect for time.	Spaniards may see Indian flexibility as inefficiency; Indians may view Spanish rigidity as strict. Align expectations on timelines.
Communication	Indirect, high-context; messages softened to preserve harmony.	Direct, expressive, clarity-valued; openness seen as authentic.	Spaniards may see Indians as evasive; Indians may see Spaniards as blunt. Teams must bridge with explicit clarifications.
Decision-Making	Top-down, especially in traditional businesses; questioning leaders is rare.	Participatory; employees contribute ideas and may challenge decisions openly.	Spaniards may view Indian processes as bureaucratic; Indians may feel uneasy with open debates. Blend both approaches.
Conflict Handling	Avoided or managed indirectly; harmony and "saving face" prioritized.	Open, assertive, debate welcomed; conflict seen as constructive.	Spaniards may misread Indian silence as agreement; Indians may find Spanish debates confrontational. Train teams in culturally sensitive conflict resolution.
Work-Life Balance	Work-centric; long hours, availability often equated with commitment.	Strong emphasis on balance; rest, family, and holidays prioritized.	Spaniards may resist long hours; Indians may expect constant availability. Leaders should set balanced boundaries.

CULTURAL OVERVIEW

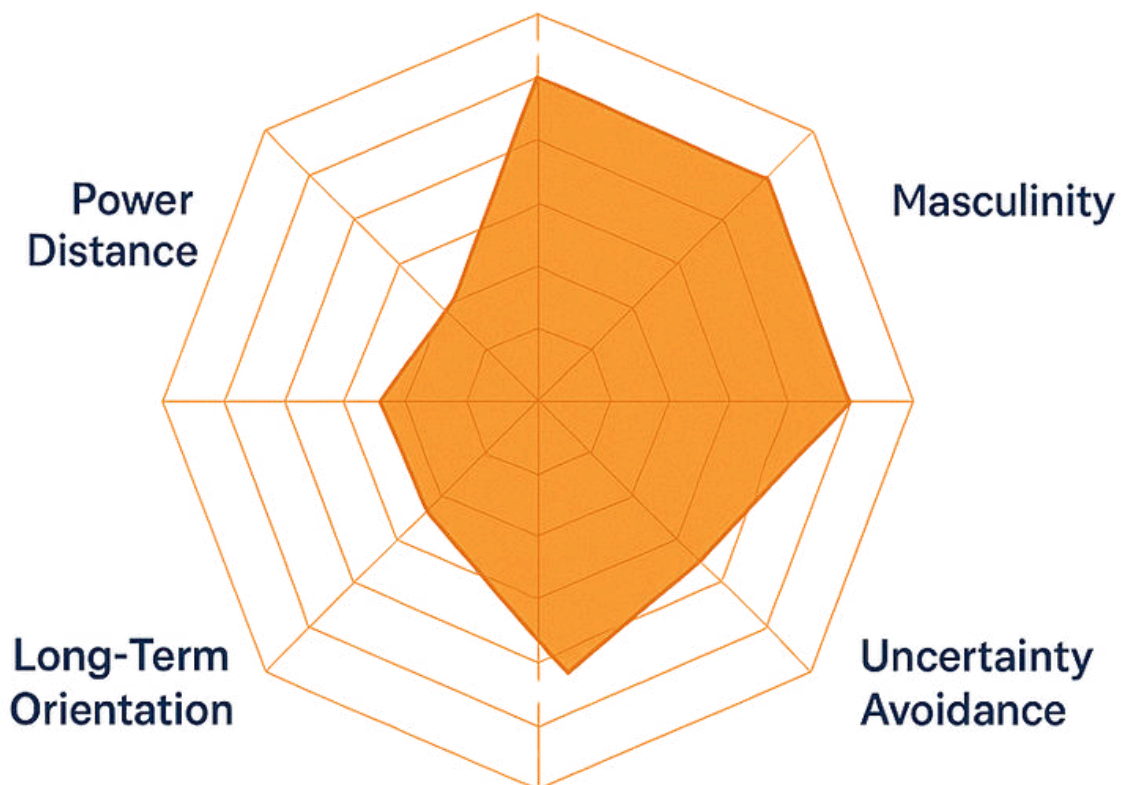
The workplace norms of India and Spain reflect broader cultural values-one rooted in formality, harmony, and flexibility, and the other in expression, structure, and work-life balance. These differences are neither better nor worse, but they require conscious navigation. By understanding these divergences in day-to-day behaviour, teams can pre-empt misunderstandings, align working styles, and build a stronger, more culturally competent workforce.



"By embracing learning through experience and fostering open communication, we are building a strong foundation for cross-cultural integration."

Tomás González, Partner & Business Development Director, IDOM

ANALYSIS IN A NUTSHELL



Do acknowledge hierarchy, build consensus and harmony, respect traditional values, and be clear about rules and processes when working across Indian and Spanish teams.



Don't ignore authority structures, create open conflict, dismiss cultural traditions, or leave expectations and processes vague when collaborating across Indian and Spanish teams.

FRICTION CHALLENGES

Despite the opportunities that multicultural collaboration offers, significant challenges can arise when cultural differences go unrecognised or unmanaged. India and Spain bring unique values, behaviours, and workplace expectations to the table. While these differences can enrich collaboration, they can also become points of friction that hinder productivity, trust, and team cohesion.

Below are six key areas where cross-cultural misunderstandings may emerge between Indian and Spanish professionals, along with their underlying causes and practical implications.

Dimension	Dimension	Challenge	Resulting Friction	Example
1. Misinterpretation of Tone & Intent (Communication)	India: Indirect, diplomatic, high-context. Spain: Direct, explicit, expressive.	Spaniards may see Indians as evasive; Indians may find Spaniards blunt or disrespectful.	Spanish lead asks: "Can this be done by Friday?" Indian reply: "It could be difficult, but we'll try" → Spanish assumes agreement; Indian signaled delay.	Use written confirmations, simple English, and clarify intent explicitly.
2. Perceived Lack of Urgency or Punctuality (Time Orientation)	India: Flexible, polychronic; multitasking normal. Spain: Punctual, structured, monochronic.	Spaniards may see Indians as disorganized; Indians may feel Spaniards rigid or micromanaging.	Spanish team frustrated by late arrivals; Indian team sees rescheduling as managing priorities.	Define shared deadlines, align calendars digitally, agree escalation for urgent issues.
3. Unequal Perceptions of Hierarchy & Empowerment	India: Clear hierarchy; decisions concentrated at the top. Spain: Flatter structures; autonomy expected.	Spaniards may find Indians overly dependent; Indians may feel uneasy with flat structures.	Spanish manager urges junior Indians to "own decisions," but they await senior approval.	Define decision rights early; coach Indians to take initiative; brief Spaniards on hierarchy norms.
4. Differing Expectations from Leadership	India: Leaders expected to be directive, protective, hands-on. Spain: Leaders seen as facilitators; independence encouraged.	Spanish leaders too hands-off; Spaniards may see Indians as lacking initiative.	Indian expects line-by-line review; Spanish manager says, "You've got this."	Blend both: provide clear guidelines, stay supportive without micromanaging.
5. Contrasting Work-Life Balance Norms	India: Long hours = commitment; after-hours work common. Spain: Strong boundaries; rest and family prioritized.	Spaniards may resist late-night calls; Indians may expect 24/7 availability.	Spanish employee ignores evening email → seen as uncommitted; Indian late nights → seen as inefficient.	Agree on shared work-hour norms; promote "respectful availability"; use scheduling tools.
6. Group Loyalty vs. Individual Autonomy	India: Collectivist; harmony valued over individual voice. Spain: Individualistic; personal opinions openly expressed.	Spaniards may view groupthink as lack of initiative; Indians may see individualism as disruptive.	Spanish openly opposes a decision already agreed on by Indian team.	Balance consensus and individual input; use structured formats (round-table inputs).

FRICTION CHALLENGES

Cross-cultural friction is not a failure of intention, but a failure of interpretation. When Indian and Spanish professionals encounter each other through their own cultural lenses, misunderstandings are natural-but not inevitable. By proactively identifying and addressing these friction points, organisations can turn potential conflicts into learning opportunities. The key lies in promoting open dialogue, shared protocols, and ongoing cultural awareness.

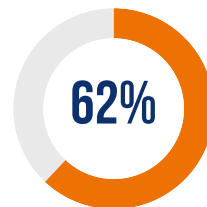
WHAT DO OUR RESPONDENTS FORSEE ?

1

Communication Clarity

62% identified communication clarity as their top improvement need

Many Indo-Spanish professionals reported that messages often get "lost in translation" - not in language, but in style. Spanish teams prefer directness, while Indian teams tend to communicate indirectly to preserve harmony. This gap often leads to misunderstandings, delayed responses, or missed signals.



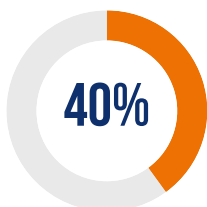
of respondents

2

Time Management & Deadlines

40% pointed to punctuality and deadlines as recurring issues

Differences in time orientation surfaced as a common challenge. Spanish professionals expect strict adherence to schedules and deadlines, while Indian counterparts may adopt a more flexible approach, prioritising relationships or contextual factors over rigid timelines. This often creates friction in joint projects.



of respondents

3

Hierarchy & Empowerment

55% experienced differences in hierarchy and empowerment expectations

A majority highlighted contrasting views on leadership and authority. Indian teams typically operate in a top-down structure, where decisions rest with senior leaders, whereas Spanish teams expect participatory decision-making and open dialogue. These mismatched expectations can affect ownership, accountability, and team morale.



of respondents



Set clear norms early-on communication, deadlines, and decision rights-to prevent cultural differences from turning into friction.



FRICTION CHALLENGES



CASE STUDY: A SUCCESS STORY – TURNING CONFLICT INTO CONNECTION

Context:

A multinational manufacturing company formed a joint innovation task force, blending Spanish engineers and Indian software specialists. Early meetings were rocky:

- Spanish members were frustrated with what they saw as long-winded discussions
- Indian members felt dismissed when their ideas were not acknowledged during fast-paced Spanish-led conversations

Intervention:

The leadership introduced structured cross-cultural communication workshops, using real team challenges as discussion material. Activities included:

- Cultural role reversals to build empathy
- Communication style mapping exercises
- Collaborative norm-setting

Team members were also rotated in roles to increase appreciation of each other's contributions. A buddy system was created where one Indian and one Spanish member were paired to co-lead specific modules.

Results:

- Meetings became more balanced, with turn-taking and agreed facilitation norms
- Deadlines and workstreams were co-created, increasing ownership
- Team satisfaction and collaboration scores improved by 30% in the next internal pulse survey



Key Takeaway:

With the right interventions—anchored in mutual respect, empathy, and structure—cross-cultural teams can evolve from conflict to high performance.



“Operating in India has taught us that technical expertise alone is not enough—cultural adaptability is just as critical. Clear communication and respect for hierarchy have helped us avoid misunderstandings and build stronger partnerships. When we balance Spanish directness with Indian diplomacy, collaboration flows much smoother and trust grows organically”

Manuel Moreno, Managing Partner, Spain, Altios International



BUILDING STRATEGIES

Developing cross-cultural competence between India and Spain cannot be left to chance - it requires structured actions at multiple levels of the organisation. From shaping company-wide policies to how managers lead and how individuals interact, every layer contributes to building a culture of trust and collaboration.

HIGHLIGHT OF SURVEY?

Adaptive Managers Boost Collaboration

48% rated teamwork as “good” or “excellent” when expectations were clarified



Structured Onboarding Reduces Conflicts

21% of companies with formal onboarding saw fewer clashes

Buddy Systems Ease Cultural Integration

30% already use informal peer support to smooth onboarding

Spanish companies that succeed in India are those that deliberately design systems to reduce friction, set clear expectations, and foster respect for both cultural perspectives. The strategies below outline practical, high-impact actions at the organisational, managerial, and individual levels, along with the tangible outcomes they can deliver.

Level	Practical Actions	Outcomes
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural Sensitisation Workshops: Interactive role plays, real scenarios, storytelling.• Cross-Cultural Team Norms: Co-create charters on communication, timelines, and meeting etiquette.• Diverse Leadership Teams: Balanced cultural representation in councils/boards.• Knowledge-Sharing Platforms: “Culture Connect” talks, digital forums, multilingual content hubs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of hierarchy, time, and communication differences.• Shared collaboration language and reduced misunderstandings.• Inclusive, culturally sensitive decision-making.• Stronger trust and curiosity across teams.
Managerial Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flex Leadership Styles: Directive yet empathetic in India; collaborative in Spain.• Clarify Expectations: Roles, deliverables, communication protocols.• Build Psychological Safety: Encourage open dialogue, use anonymous feedback tools.• Localised Engagement Plans: Recognise Diwali/Navratri, Semana Santa/San Fermín, cultural trivia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher engagement and reduced resistance.• Less rework and misalignment.• Employees feel safe, valued, and empowered.• Stronger belongingness and cultural pride.
Individual Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural Intelligence (CQ): Micro-learning, self-reflection, cross-cultural projects.• Language Sensitivity: Use neutral English, avoid idioms, and check understanding.• Mentoring & Buddy Systems: Pair employees across cultures, cross-cultural coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More adaptable, empathetic, and self-aware professionals.• Clearer, inclusive communication.• Trust-building and long-term peer learning.

BUILDING STRATEGIES

One of the most common sources of misunderstanding between Indian and Spanish teams lies in how time and deadlines are interpreted. While Indian professionals often treat timelines with flexibility—focusing on relationships and last-minute effort—Spanish counterparts usually expect structured delivery and punctuality. Without explicit discussion, this difference can create frustration and erode trust.

The following example illustrates how easily expectations can diverge, and how simple alignment tools can prevent misinterpretation:



CASE STUDY: WHEN DIRECTNESS FEELS LIKE DISRESPECT

Context:

A Spanish sales head, Miguel, partnered with an Indian marketing team to prepare materials for a high-stakes client pitch. The Indian team assured delivery “by Thursday,” but the file arrived late Thursday night—just before Miguel's early Friday morning presentation. Miguel felt let down and perceived the team as careless. He reported his frustration to leadership, citing “lack of accountability.”

What Happened:

In Indian work culture, especially in collaborative environments, timelines are often viewed with a degree of flexibility and negotiation. Saying “Thursday” might mean anytime before midnight, driven by a culture that accommodates last-minute effort and adjustments. In contrast, Spaniards typically associate deadlines with punctuality and structured delivery.

Resolution:

The team introduced a shared project tracker with explicit cut-off times and shared definitions of deadline terms (e.g., “Thursday EOD means 5 PM IST / 1:30 PM CET”). The Indian team also adjusted their time management approach to meet expectations.

Key Takeaway:

Assumptions around time and urgency must be explicitly discussed. Misaligned expectations can easily lead to perceived unreliability.

TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

To navigate the complex landscape of cross-cultural interactions, organisations and individuals can benefit from structured models and frameworks. These tools help decode cultural nuances, build understanding, and enable more effective collaboration.



“By embracing learning through experience and fostering open communication, we are building a strong foundation for cross-cultural integration.”

Aakriti Vohra, International Development, LaLiga

Understanding these dimensions can explain behaviour like:

Use this to tailor leadership approaches, delegation styles, and communication strategies.

1. Lewis Model of Culture

What It Is:

Richard Lewis categorised national cultures into three types:

- Linear-Active (task-oriented, organised) – e.g., Germany, USA
- Multi-Active (people-oriented, emotional) – e.g., Spain, Italy
- Reactive (respectful, listening-focused) – e.g., India, Japan

Application:

- Spanish professionals may interrupt or multitask more in meetings (multi-active)
- Indian colleagues may take longer to respond, listening more first (reactive)
- Recognising these rhythms helps avoid mislabeling behaviour as “disrespectful” or “inefficient.”

2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Framework

What It Is:

CQ is a globally recognised model that measures and builds your ability to work across cultures.

It includes 4 capabilities:

- CQ Drive – Motivation to engage with other cultures
- CQ Knowledge – Understanding how cultures differ
- CQ Strategy – Awareness and planning for cultural interactions
- CQ Action – Ability to adapt communication and behaviour

Application:

Organisations can assess CQ levels using psychometric tools and provide training to strengthen each domain. For example:

- Train Indian managers to respond to Spanish directness without defensiveness (CQ Action)
- Help Spanish teams understand the role of hierarchy in Indian setups (CQ Knowledge)

3. GlobeSmart Country Comparisons

What It Is:

A digital tool that allows employees to compare work style preferences across cultures using five dimensions:

- Independent vs Interdependent
- Egalitarian vs Status-Oriented
- Risk-Taking vs Cautious
- Direct vs Indirect Communication
- Task vs Relationship Focus



TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

Application:

Indian-Spanish team members can use the tool before cross-cultural projects to visualise differences and common ground.

Example: An Indian professional may lean toward indirect communication and hierarchical thinking, while a Spanish counterpart may value flat structures and directness. This can be the basis for setting team norms.

4. RADAR Model for Cultural Sensitivity

What It Is:

A practical 5-step framework to handle cultural differences in real-time with grace and clarity:

1. Recognize Difference
2. Notice a behaviour that seems unfamiliar or uncomfortable
3. Assess Cultural Assumptions
4. Ask yourself: "Is this due to cultural norms or individual behaviour?"
5. Dialogue Openly
6. Approach the other party with curiosity, not judgment
7. Align on Expectations
8. Clarify roles, timelines, and communication tone
9. Resolve Respectfully
10. Find a culturally inclusive solution that respects both parties

Application:

A Spanish manager confused by a vague update from an Indian teammate could use RADAR to pause, reflect, initiate a clarifying conversation, and co-create clear communication norms without escalating tension.

Why These Tools Matter

Cross-cultural competence is not just about knowledge about awareness, adaptability, and action. These tools offer structured ways to:

- Decode behavioural signals
- Avoid assumptions and stereotypes
- Build mutual respect and productive relationships

Used together, they form a strong toolkit for any global workforce aiming to **bridge differences and thrive in cultural diversity**.



"Embracing diverse perspectives has strengthened our collaboration and driven collective growth, while challenges have become opportunities for learning and motivation."

Alfredo Miranda Prieto, Business Head - Transport Railways, INDRA SISTEMAS S.A.

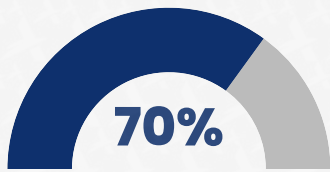


RECOMMENDATIONS

To turn cultural diversity into a business advantage, Spanish companies in India must go beyond awareness and embed cross-cultural competence into everyday practices. The following recommendations provide practical steps to strengthen collaboration and reduce friction:

1. Invest in Continuous Learning

Make cultural development an ongoing process rather than a one-off training. Provide regular sensitisation workshops, role-plays, and onboarding modules focused on Indian-Spanish dynamics. Support language coaching and e-learning on frameworks such as Hofstede, Cultural Intelligence (CQ), or the Lewis Model. For example, before launching a project, Spanish managers can undergo immersive sessions on Indian communication styles and etiquette.



Data Point: 70% expressed confidence that structured training and communication clarity initiatives would significantly improve Indo-Spanish collaboration.

2. Foster Curiosity and Inclusivity

Encourage teams to ask, share, and celebrate differences openly. Simple initiatives such as a “Culture Minute” during meetings or cultural storytelling events can normalise curiosity. Leaders must model inclusivity by valuing diverse inputs and creating space for dialogue.

3. Align Policies with Cultural Flexibility

Global operations require flexible systems. Alternate meeting times across time zones, allow employees to choose culturally significant holidays, and set communication protocols that balance Spanish directness with Indian diplomacy. Even small changes-like rotating facilitators, make participation more balanced.

4. Establish Feedback Loops

Build safe channels to surface and resolve cultural friction early. Use pulse surveys, anonymous feedback tools, or reflection sessions in project retrospectives. Train managers to decode cultural intent in conflicts and resolve them constructively.

By embedding these practices, **Spanish firms can transform cross-cultural differences into a source of innovation, trust, and long-term business success**

CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural competence is no longer a “nice-to-have”—it’s a critical capability in the global business ecosystem.

In the Indian-Spanish work context, the contrasts are striking: hierarchy vs. equality, flexibility vs. structure, indirectness vs. directness. Yet these differences are not barriers—they are portals to deeper understanding and richer collaboration.



“In our work with Spanish subsidiaries in India, we see that cultural alignment is often as critical as operational efficiency. Cross-cultural competence enables smoother collaboration and stronger long-term results.”

Manish Dwivedi, Assistant General Manager Human Resources, M+V Altios

When Indian and Spanish professionals come together with curiosity, empathy, and a shared purpose, their unique perspectives can spark innovation, build trust, and create enduring partnerships.

By investing in awareness, aligning systems, and nurturing inclusive behaviours, organizations can transform **cross-cultural collaboration** from a potential friction point into a strategic advantage—a source of **agility, creativity, and global relevance**.

Harmony across cultures is not accidental—it is cultivated. With intention, respect, and learning, India and Spain can not only work together but thrive together.



“India presents Spanish investors with a compelling opportunity to tap into one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. With its large and youthful consumer base, robust digital infrastructure, and progressive reforms aimed at ease of doing business, India offers a fertile ground for innovation, manufacturing, and service-led investments. Its strategic location in Asia, strong bilateral ties with Spain, and expanding middle class make it an ideal destination for long-term growth and value creation..”

Ajay Anand, Executive Vice President, Kotak Mahindra Bank

References / Resources

- Hofstede Insights – <https://www.hofstede-insights.com>
- Erin Meyer – The Culture Map – <https://erinmeyer.com/books/the-culture-map>
- David Livermore – Leading with Cultural Intelligence – <https://davidlivermore.com/my-books/leading-with-cultural-intelligence>
- GlobeSmart Cultural Tools – (no direct site found, often provided via corporate platforms like Aperian Global)
- Harvard Business Review (Global Team Management Articles) – <https://hbr.org>



- Success Roadmap
- Market Entry & Expansion
- Performance Improvement



- Exec. Talent Acquisition
- Incubation & HR Services
- Subsidiary Management
- Supply Chain

- Manufacturing Investment
- Cross-Border Acquisition
- Post-Merger Integration

Speak to us today to see how we can help you



km@mv-altios.com

+91 98211 14504
+49 221 880 4080

+91 124 4342 300

info@maiervidorno.com

www.maiervidorno.com

25+ years helping Foreign firms in India

