
Developing Global Fitness

The 5S Stretch Tool

**Developing Behavioural Flexibility
in Intercultural Encounters**

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Developing Behavioural Flexibility in Intercultural Encounters

The aim of this journaling tool is to help you develop *behavioural flexibility* so that you can adjust your behaviour, as needed, when living, studying and/or working in culturally unfamiliar contexts. To develop this aspect of intercultural competence, you need to be able to:

- ✓ Notice any different cultural patterns of behaviour;
- ✓ Identify any differences that you want/need to adjust to;
- ✓ Stretch your thinking and behaviour;
- ✓ Consolidate your behavioural flexibility.

On the following pages, you will find a set of steps, the 5S stretch steps (2 Planning Steps and 3 Implementation Steps), that will help you in this process. The journaling tool draws significantly on the work of Andy Molinsky which he describes in his book *Global Dexterity* (2013, Harvard Business Review Press). We also provide worked examples of a very similar tool in our book [Global Fitness for Global People: How to manage and leverage cultural diversity at work \(2022, Castledown\)](#).

Use these 5S prompts for your IC Journal!	
✓ S <u>pot</u> any different cultural patterns	} 2 Planning Steps
✓ S <u>elect</u> your personal behavioural challenges	
✓ S <u>tudy</u> the behaviour you want to develop	} 3 Implementation Steps
✓ S <u>tretch</u> your thinking and behaviour	
✓ S <u>trengthen</u> the suitable adjustments you've made	



The 5S Stretch Tool¹

2 Planning Steps

1. *Spot* different cultural/behavioural patterns



A vital first step on the journey to intercultural competence/effectiveness is building your expertise in *spotting* or *discerning* cultural/behavioural patterns. This entails:

- Looking and watching carefully all that happens around you;
- Listening attentively to what people say;
- Learning as much as you can about your new context.

To do this systematically, you may find the following chart helpful. Try filling in the various sections with any differences that you have noticed.

<i>3Ps of Culture</i> <i>Life Domains</i>	Products	Practices	Perspectives
Daily Life			
Work/Study Life			
Social Life			

¹ Use this Stretch tool as a template for writing about your intercultural challenges and learning progress.



2. Select your personal cultural challenges



a. Prioritise your Challenges

Not all cultural differences are necessarily important or difficult to adjust to, so it's best to focus on those that are particularly challenging for you personally. List here the cultural patterns that are priority challenges for you:

b. Reflect on your Priority Challenges

Consider how you feel about adjusting your behaviour to fit in with the cultural patterns you've listed:

- Do you feel comfortable in adjusting your behaviour?²
- Do you feel you have the skills to adjust your behaviour?³

Andy Molinsky⁴ suggests placing each of your priority challenges in one of the four quadrants:

		Do I feel comfortable performing this behaviour?	
		Yes	No
Can I perform the behaviour successfully?	Yes		
	No		

For worked examples of this, see our book [Global Fitness for Global People: How to manage and leverage cultural diversity at work \(2022, Castledown\)](#)

² Is the new behaviour compatible with your cultural values and beliefs?

³ Do you feel you have the knowledge and skills to adapt your behaviour?

⁴ Molinsky, A. (2013) *Global Dexterity*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, p.135.



3 Implementation Steps

3. *Study* the behaviour you want to develop



a. Seek advice

- Talk with people who can give you helpful advice – cultural informants who know the country culture or organisational culture well

b. Observe

- Watch carefully how other people perform the behaviour you want to develop.
- Note down the various ways in which they handle it
- Decide which would be most suitable for you.



4. *Stretch* your thinking and behaviour



a. Dealing with your comfort challenges

If you feel uncomfortable about changing a particular aspect of your behaviour, think through the following questions and note down your thoughts:

- 1) What personal goals could be achieved better if you adjusted this aspect of your behaviour?
- 2) Think about the range of issues or principles that are important to you. How could you promote any of them by adjusting this aspect of your behaviour?
- 3) How could the behaviour that you find uncomfortable be explained logically from the other person's perspective?

b. Dealing with your competence challenges

- If you find it difficult to adjust your behaviour because you're not sure how to do it, try starting with small but personally meaningful adjustments.
- Note down some ideas here:



5. *Strengthen* the adjustments you've made



a. Monitor your progress

- For each of your adjustment challenges, monitor how (a) comfortable and/or (b) competent you feel in adapting your behaviour. Note down any difficulties you're still experiencing.

b. Get further help from others

- Look for someone who could be a model for you – someone whom you can watch carefully and from whom you can pick up new strategies and ideas.
- Find someone who can act as a mentor to you.
- Note down your experiences of getting help from others.