Communication is the exchange of meaning: it is my attempt to let you know what I mean. Communication includes any behavior that another human being perceives and interprets: it is your understanding of what I mean. Communication includes sending both verbal messages (words) and nonverbal messages (tone of voice, facial expression, behavior, and physical setting). It includes consciously sent messages as well as messages that the sender is totally unaware of sending. Whatever I say and do, I cannot help communicating. Communication therefore involves a complex, multilayered, dynamic process through which we exchange meaning.

Every communication has a message sender and a message receiver. The sent message is never identical to the received message. Why? Communication is indirect; it is a symbolic behavior. Ideas, feelings, and pieces of information cannot be communicated directly but must be externalized or symbolized before being communicated. Encoding describes the producing of a symbol message. Decoding describes the receiving of a message from a symbol. The message sender must encode his or her meaning into a form that the receiver will recognize—that is, into words and behavior. Receivers must then decode the words and behavior—the symbols—back into messages that have meaning for them.

For example because the Cantonese word for “eight” sounds like jaat, which means prosperity, a Hong Kong textile manufacturer Mr. Lau Ting-pong paid $5 million in 1988 for car registration number 8. A year later a European millionaire paid $4.8 million at Hong Kong’s Lunar New Year auction for vehicle registration number 7, a
decision that mystified the Chinese, since the number 7 has little significance in the Chinese calculation of fortune.

Translating meanings into words and behaviors - that is into symbols - and back again into meanings is based on a person's cultural background and is not the same for each person. The greater the difference in background between senders and receivers, the greater the difference in meanings attached to particular words and behaviors.

Cross-cultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture. Cross-cultural miscommunication occurs when the person from the second culture does not receive the sender's intended message. The greater the differences between the sender's and the receiver's cultures, the greater the chance for cross-cultural miscommunication.

Communication does not necessarily result in understanding. Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chances of accurately transmitting a message are low. Foreigners see, interpret, and evaluate things differently, and consequently act upon them differently. In approaching cross-cultural situations, one should therefore assume difference until similarity is proven. It is also important to recognize that all behavior makes sense through the eyes of the person behaving and that logic and rationale are culturally relative. In cross-cultural situations, labeling behavior as bizarre usually reflects culturally based misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation; rarely does it reflect intentional malice or pathologically motivated behavior. Unwritten rules reflect a culture's interpretation of its surroundings.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISPERCEPTION

No two national groups see the world in exactly the same way. Perception is the process by which each individual selects, organizes, and evaluates stimuli from the external environment to provide meaningful experiences for himself or herself. Perceptual patterns are neither innate nor absolute. They are selective, learned, culturally determined, consistent, and inaccurate.

- **Perception is selective.** At any one time there are too many stimuli in the environment for us to observe. Therefore, we screen out most of what we see, hear, taste, and feel. We screen out the overload and allow only selected information through our perceptual screen to our conscious mind.
- **Perceptual patterns are learned.** We are not born seeing the world in one particular way. Our experience teaches us to perceive the world in certain ways.
- **Perception is culturally determined.** We learn to see the world in a certain way based on our cultural background.
- **Perception tends to remain constant.** Once we see something in a particular way, we continue to see it that way.
- **We therefore see things that do not exist, and do not see things that do exist.** Our interests, values, and culture act as filters and lead us to distort, block, and even create what we choose to see and hear. We perceive what
we expect to perceive. We perceive things according to what we have been trained to see, according to our cultural map.

The distorting impact of perceptual filters causes us to see things that do not exist.

**CROSS-CULTURAL MISINTERPRETATION**

*Interpretation occurs when an individual gives meaning to observations and their relationships*; it is the process of making sense out of perceptions. Interpretation organizes our experience to guide our behavior. Based on our experience, we make assumptions about our perceptions so we will not have to rediscover meanings each time we encounter similar situations. For example, we make assumptions about how doors work, based on our experience of entering and leaving rooms; thus we do not have to relearn each time we have to open a door. Similarly, when we smell smoke, we generally assume there is a fire. Our consistent patterns of interpretation help us to act appropriately and quickly within our day-to-day world.

**Categories**

Since we are constantly bombarded with more stimuli than we can absorb and more perceptions than we can keep distinct, we only perceive those images that may be meaningful. We group perceived images into familiar categories that help to simplify our environment, become the basis for our interpretations, and allow us to function in an otherwise overly complex world.

**Categories of perceived images become ineffective when we place people and things in the wrong group.** Cross-cultural miscategorization occurs when I use my home country categories to make sense out of foreign situations.

**Stereotypes**

Stereotyping involves a form of categorization that organizes our experience and guides our behavior toward ethnic and national groups. Stereotypes never describe individual behavior; rather, they describe the behavioral norm for members of a particular group.

Stereotypes, like other forms of categories, can be helpful or harmful depending on how we use them. Effective stereotyping allows people to understand and act appropriately in new situations. A stereotype can be helpful when it is

- **Consciously held.** The person should be aware that he or she is describing a group norm rather than the characteristics of a specific individual.
- **Descriptive rather than evaluative.** The stereotype should describe what people from this group will probably be like and not evaluate those people as good or bad.
- **Accurate.** The stereotype should accurately describe the norm for the group to which the person belongs.
- **The first best guess** about a group prior to having direct information about the specific person or persons involved.
• **Modified**, based on further observation and experience with the actual people and situations.

A subconsciously held stereotype is difficult to modify or discard even after we collect real information about a person, because it is often thought to reflect reality. If a subconscious stereotype also inaccurately evaluates a person or situation, we are likely to maintain an inappropriate, ineffective, and frequently harmful guide to reality.

Managers ranked "most internationally effective" by their colleagues altered their stereotypes to fit the actual people involved, whereas managers ranked "least internationally effective" continued to maintain their stereotypes even in the face of contradictory information.

**To be effective, international managers must therefore be aware of cultural stereotypes and learn to set them aside when faced with contradictory evidence.** They cannot pretend not to stereotype.

If stereotyping is so useful as an initial guide to reality, why do people criticize it? The answer is that we **have failed to accept stereotyping as a natural process and have consequently failed to learn to use it to our advantage.** For years we have viewed stereotyping as a form of primitive thinking, as an unnecessary simplification of reality. We have also viewed stereotyping as immoral: stereotypes can be **inappropriate judgments of individuals** based on inaccurate descriptions of groups. It is true that labeling people from a certain ethnic group as "bad" is immoral, but grouping individuals into categories is neither good nor bad—it simply reduces a complex reality to manageable dimensions. Negative views of stereotyping simply cloud our ability to understand people's actual behavior and impair our awareness of our own stereotypes. **Everyone stereotypes.**

In conclusion, some people stereotype effectively and others do not. **Stereotypes become counterproductive when we place people in the wrong groups, when we incorrectly describe the group norm, when we inappropriately evaluate the group or category, when we confuse the stereotype with the description of a particular individual, and when we fail to modify the stereotype based on our actual observations and experience.**

**Sources of Misinterpretation**

Misinterpretation can be caused by inaccurate perceptions of a person or situation that arise when what actually exists is not seen. Culture strongly influences, and in many cases determines, our interpretations. **Both the categories and the meanings we attach to them are based on our cultural background.** Sources of cross-cultural misinterpretation include subconscious cultural "blinders," a lack of cultural self-awareness, projected similarity, and parochialism.

**Subconscious Cultural Blinders.** Because most interpretation goes on at a subconscious level, we lack awareness of the assumptions we make and their cultural basis. Our home culture reality never forces us to examine our assumptions.
or the extent to which they are culturally based, because we share our cultural assumptions with most other citizens of our country.

**Lack of Cultural Self-Awareness.** Although we think that the major obstacle in international business is in understanding the foreigner, the greater difficulty involves becoming aware of our own cultural conditioning. As anthropologist Edward Hall has explained, "What is known least well, and is therefore in the poorest position to be studied, is what is closest to oneself." We are generally least aware of our own cultural characteristics and are quite surprised when we hear foreigners' descriptions of us.

To the extent that we can begin to see ourselves clearly through the eyes of foreigners, we can begin to modify our behavior, emphasizing our most appropriate and effective characteristics and minimizing those least helpful. To the extent that we are culturally self-aware, we can begin to predict the effect our behavior will have on others.

**Projected Similarity.** Projected similarity refers to the assumption that people are more similar to you than they actually are, or that a situation is more similar to yours when in fact it is not (see Lecture 1).

One of the best exercises for developing empathy and reducing parochialism and projected similarity is role reversal. Imagine that you are a foreign businessperson. Imagine the type of family you come from, the number of brothers and sisters you have, the social and economic conditions you grew up with, the type of education you received, the ways in which you chose your profession and position, the ways in which you were introduced to your spouse, your goals in working for your organization, and your life goals. Asking these questions forces you to see the other person as he or she really is, and not as a mere reflection of yourself. It forces you to see both the similarities and the differences, and not to imagine similarities when differences actually exist. Moreover, role reversal encourages highly task-oriented businesspeople, such as Americans, to see the foreigner as a whole person rather than someone with a position and a set of skills needed to accomplish a particular task.

**CROSS-CULTURAL MISEVALUATION**

Even more than perception and interpretation, cultural conditioning strongly affects evaluation. Evaluation involves judging whether someone or something is good or bad. Cross-culturally, we use our own culture as a standard of measurement, judging that which is like our own culture as normal and good and that which is different as abnormal and bad. Our own culture becomes a self-reference criterion: since no other culture is identical to our own, we judge all other cultures as inferior (substandard). Evaluation rarely helps in trying to understand or communicate with people from another culture.
Effective cross-cultural communication is possible, but international managers cannot approach it in the same way as do domestic managers.

First, effective international managers "know that they don't know". They assume difference until similarity is proven rather than assuming similarity until difference is proven.

Second, in attempting to understand their foreign colleagues, effective international managers emphasize description, by observing what is actually said and done, rather than interpreting or evaluating it. Describing a situation is the most accurate way to gather information about it. Interpretation and evaluation, unlike description, are based more on the observer's culture and background than on the observed situation.

Third, when attempting to understand or interpret a foreign situation, effective international managers try to see it through the eyes of their foreign colleagues.

Fourth, once effective international managers develop an explanation for a situation, they treat the explanation as a guess (as a hypothesis to be tested) and not as a certainty. They systematically check with other foreign and home country colleagues to make sure that their guesses - their interpretations - are plausible. This checking process allows them to converge meanings - to delay accepting their interpretations of the situation until they have confirmed them with others.

Understanding: Converging Meanings

There are many ways to increase the chances for accurately understanding foreigners. The passage that follows suggests what to do when business colleagues are not native speakers of your language. Each technique is based on presenting the message through multiple channels (for example, stating your position and showing a graph to summarize the same position), paraphrasing to check if the foreigner has understood your meaning (and not just your words), and converging meanings (always double-checking with a second person that you communicated what you intended).

What Do I Do If They Do Not Speak My Language?

**VERBAL BEHAVIOR**
- **Clear, slow speech.** Enunciate each word. Do not use colloquial expressions.
- **Repetition.** Repeat each important idea using different words to explain the same concept.
- **Simple sentences.** Avoid compound, long sentences.
- **Active verbs.** Avoid passive verbs.

**NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR**
- **Visual restatements.** Use as many visual restatements as possible, such as pictures, graphs, tables, and slides.
- **Gestures.** Use more facial and hand gestures to emphasize the meaning of words.
• **Demonstration.** Act out as many themes as possible.
• **Pauses.** Pause more frequently.
• **Summaries.** Hand out written summaries of your verbal presentation.

**ATTRIBUTION**
• **Silence.** When there is a silence, wait. Do not jump in to fill the silence. The other person is probably just thinking more slowly in the non-native language or translating.
• **Intelligence.** Do not equate poor grammar and mispronunciation with lack of intelligence; it is usually a sign of second language use.
• **Differences.** If unsure, assume difference, not similarity.

**COMPREHENSION**
• **Understanding.** Do not just assume that they understand; assume that they do not understand.
• **Checking comprehension.** Have colleagues repeat their understanding of the material back to you. Do not simply ask if they understand or not. Let them explain what they understand to you.

**DESIGN**
• **Breaks.** Take more frequent breaks. Second language comprehension is exhausting.
• **Small modules.** Divide the material into smaller modules.
• **Longer time frame.** Allocate more time for each module than usual in a monolingual program.

**MOTIVATION**
• **Encouragement.** Verbally and nonverbally encourage and reinforce speaking by non-native language participants.
• **Drawing out.** Explicitly draw out marginal and passive participants.
• **Reinforcement.** Do not embarrass novice speakers.

**Standing Back from Yourself**
Perhaps the most difficult skill in cross-cultural communication involves standing back from yourself, or being aware that you do not know everything, that a situation may not make sense, that your guesses may be wrong, and that the ambiguity in the situation may continue. In this sense the ancient Roman dictum "knowledge is power" becomes true. In knowing yourself, you gain power over your perceptions and reactions; you can control your own behavior and your reactions to others' behavior. Cross-cultural awareness complements in-depth self-awareness. A lack of self-awareness negates the usefulness of cross-cultural awareness.

**SUMMARY**
Cross-cultural communication confronts us with limits to our perceptions, our interpretations, and our evaluations. Cross-cultural perspectives tend to render everything relative and slightly uncertain. Entering a foreign culture is tantamount to knowing the words without knowing the music, or knowing the music without knowing the beat. Our natural tendencies lead us back to our prior experience: our default option becomes the familiarity of our own culture, thus prevent our accurate understanding of others' cultures.

Strategies to overcome our natural parochial tendencies exist: with care, the default option can be avoided. We can learn to see, understand, and control our own cultural conditioning. In facing foreign cultures, we can emphasize description rather than interpretation or evaluation, and thus minimize self-fulfilling
stereotypes and premature closure. We can recognize and use our stereotypes as guides rather than rejecting them as unsophisticated simplifications. Effective cross-cultural communication presupposes the interplay of alternative realities: it rejects the actual or potential domination of one reality over another.

All international business activity involves communication. Within the international and global business environment, activities such as exchanging information and ideas, decision making, negotiating, motivating, and leading are all based on the ability of managers from one culture to communicate successfully with managers and employees from other cultures.

Cultural communications are deeper and more complex than spoken or written messages. The essence of effective cross-cultural communication has more to do with releasing the right responses than with sending the "right" messages. We offer here some conceptual tools to help our readers decipher the complex, unspoken rules of each culture.

**Fast and Slow Messages: Finding the Appropriate Speed**

The speed with which a particular message can be decoded and acted on is an important characteristic of human communication. There are fast and slow messages. A headline or cartoon, for example, is fast; the meaning that one extracts from books or art is slow. A fast message sent to people who are geared to a slow format will usually miss the target. While the content of the wrong-speed message may be understandable, it won't be received by someone accustomed to or expecting a different speed. The problem is that few people are aware that information can be sent at different speeds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fast Messages</th>
<th>Slow Messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headlines</td>
<td>Books</td>
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<tr>
<td>A communiqué</td>
<td>An ambassador</td>
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<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cartoons</td>
<td>Etchings</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV commercials</td>
<td>TV documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy familiarity</td>
<td>Deep relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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</table>

The message is, of course, slower in some cultures than in others. In the United States it is not too difficult to get to know people quickly in a relatively superficial way, which is all that most Americans want. Foreigners have often commented on how "unbelievably friendly" the Americans are. However, when Edward T. Hall studied the subject for the U.S. State Department, he discovered a worldwide complaint about Americans: they seem capable of forming only one kind of friendship—the informal, superficial kind that does not involve an exchange of deep confidences.

Conversely, in Europe personal relationships and friendships are highly valued and tend to take a long time to solidify. This is largely a function of the long-lasting, well-
established networks of friends and relationships - particularly among the French - that one finds in Europe. Although there are exceptions, as a rule it will take Americans longer than they expect to really get to know Europeans. It is difficult, and at times may even be impossible, for a foreigner to break into these networks. Nevertheless, many businesspeople have found it expedient to take the time and make the effort to develop genuine friends among their business associates.

**High And Low Context: How Much Information Is Enough?**

*Context* is the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event. The elements that combine to produce a given meaning - events and context - are in different proportions depending on the culture. The cultures of the world can be compared on a scale from high to low context.

A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

Japanese, Arabs, and Mediterranean peoples, who have extensive information networks among family, friends, colleagues, and clients and who are involved in close personal relationships, are high context. As a result, for most normal transactions in daily life they do not require, nor do they expect, much in-depth, background information. This is because they keep themselves informed about everything having to do with the people who are important in their lives. Low-context people include Americans, Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians, and other northern Europeans; they compartmentalize their personal relationships, their work, and many aspects of day-to-day life. Consequently, each time they interact with others they need detailed background information. The French are much higher on the context scale than either the Germans or the Americans. This difference can affect virtually every situation and every relationship in which the members of these two opposite traditions find themselves.

Within each culture, of course, there are specific individual differences in the need for contexting - the process of filling in background data. But it is helpful to know whether the culture of a particular country falls on the high or low side of the scale since every person is influenced by the level of context.

Contexting performs multiple functions. For example, any shift in the level of context is a communication. The shift can be up the scale, indicating a warming of the relationship, or down the scale (lowering the context), communicating coolness or displeasure-signaling something has gone wrong with a relationship. First-naming in the United States is an artificial attempt at high-contexting; it tends to offend Europeans, who view the use of first names as acceptable only between close friends and family. With Europeans, one is always safe using a formal form of address, waiting for the other person to indicate when familiarity is acceptable.

Like their near relations, the Germans, many Anglo-Americans (mostly those of northern European heritage) are not only low-context but they also lack extensive, well-developed information networks. American networks are limited in scope and
development compared to those of the French, the Spanish, the Italians, and the Japanese.

What follows from this is that Americans, unless they are very unsophisticated, will feel the need for contexting, for detailed background information, any time they are asked to make a decision or to do something. The American approach to life is quite segmented and focused on discrete, compartmentalized information. It is characteristic of high-context, high-information societies that attendance at functions is as much a matter of the prestige associated with the function as anything else. This in turn means that, quite frequently, invitations to high-level meetings and conferences will be issued on short notice. It is taken for granted that those invited will avoid all previous commitments if the meeting is important enough. As a general rule Americans place greater importance on how long ago a commitment was made, on the agenda, and on the relevance of the expertise of different individuals to the agenda.

Another example of the contrast between how high- and low-context systems work is this: consider a top American executive working in an office and receiving a normal quota of visitors, usually one at a time. Most of the information that is relevant to the job originates from the few people the executive sees in the course of the day, as well as from what she or he reads. This is why the advisors and support personnel who surround the presidents of American enterprises (as well as the president of the United States) are so important. They and they alone control the content and the flow of organizational information to the chief executive.

Contrast this with the office of virtually any business executive in a high-context country such as France or Japan, where information flows freely and from all sides. Not only are people constantly coming and going, both seeking and giving information, but the entire form and function of the organization is centered on gathering, processing, and disseminating information. Everyone stays informed about every aspect of the business and knows who is best informed on what subjects.

In Germany almost everything is low-context and compartmentalized. The executive office is both a refuge and a screen - a refuge for the boss from the distractions of day-to-day office interactions and a screen for the employees from continual supervision. Information communicated in the office is not shared except with a select few - the exact antithesis of the high-information cultures.

High-context people are apt to become impatient and irritated when low-context people insist on giving them information they don't need. Conversely, low-context people are at a loss when high-context people do not provide enough information. One of the great communications challenges in life is to find the appropriate level of contexting needed in each situation.

Space

Every living thing has a visible physical boundary - its skin - separating it from its external environment. This visible boundary is surrounded by a series of invisible boundaries that are more difficult to define but are just as real. These other boundaries begin with the individual's personal space and terminate with her or his "territory."
Territoriality

In humans territoriality is highly developed and strongly influenced by culture. It is particularly well developed in the Germans and the Americans. Americans tend to establish places that they label "mine". In Germany this same feeling of territoriality is commonly extended to all possessions, including the automobile.

Space also communicates power. A corner office suite in the United States is conventionally occupied by "the brass," and a private office in any location has more status than a desk in the open without walls. In both German and American business, the top floors are reserved for high-ranking officials and executives. In contrast, important French officials occupy a position in the middle; the emphasis there is on occupying the central position in an information network, where one can stay informed and can control what is happening.

Personal Space

Personal space is another form of territory. Each person has around him an invisible bubble of space which expands and contracts depending on a number of things: the relationship to the people nearby, the person's emotional state, cultural background, and the activity being performed. Few people are allowed to penetrate this bit of mobile territory and then only for short periods of time. Changes in the bubble, brought about by cramped quarters or crowding, cause people to feel uncomfortable or aggressive. In northern Europe, the bubbles are quite large and people keep their distance. In southern France, Italy, Greece, and Spain, the bubbles get smaller and smaller so that the distance that is perceived as intimate in the north overlaps normal conversational distance in the south, all of which means that Mediterranean Europeans "get too close" to the Germans, the Scandinavians, the English, and those Americans of northern European ancestry. In northern Europe one does not touch others. Even the brushing of the overcoat sleeve used to elicit an apology.

Unconscious Reactions to Spatial Differences

Spatial changes give tone to communication, accent it, and at times even override the spoken word. As people interact, the flow and shift of distance between them is integral to the communication process. For example, if a stranger does not maintain "normal" conversational distance and gets too close, our reaction is automatic - we feel uncomfortable, sometimes even offended or threatened and we back up.

Since most people don't think about personal distance as something that is culturally patterned, foreign spatial cues are almost inevitably misinterpreted. This can lead to bad feelings, which are then projected onto the people from the other culture in a most personal way. When a foreigner appears aggressive and pushy, or remote and cold, it may mean only that her or his personal distance is different from yours.

Time
In the sections that follow we restrict ourselves to those manifestations of time that have proved to be stumbling blocks at the cultural interface.

**Monochronic and Polychronic Time**

There are many kinds of time systems in the world, but two are most important to international business. We call them monochronic and polychronic time. Monochronic time means paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. Polychronic time means being involved with many things at once. Like oil and water, the two systems do not mix.

In monochronic cultures, time is experienced and used in a linear way-comparable to a road extending from the past into the future. Monochronic time is scheduled and compartmentalized, making it possible for a person to concentrate on one thing at a time. In a monochronic system, the schedule may take priority above all else and be treated as sacred and unalterable.

Monochronic time dominates most business in the United States. While Americans perceive it as almost in the air they breathe, it is nevertheless a learned product of northern European culture and is therefore arbitrary and imposed. Other Western cultures - Switzerland, Germany, and Scandinavia in particular - are dominated by the iron hand of monochronic time as well. German and Swiss cultures represent classic examples of monochronic time. Still, monochronic time is not natural time; in fact, it seems to violate many of humanity's innate rhythms.

In almost every respect, polychronic systems are the antithesis of monochronic systems. Polychronic time is characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of many things and by a great involvement with people. There is more emphasis on completing human transactions than on holding to schedules. For example, two polychronic Latins conversing on a street corner would likely opt to be late for their next appointment rather than abruptly terminate the conversation before its natural conclusion. Polychronic time is experienced as much less tangible than monochronic time and can better be compared to a single point than to a road.

While the generalizations listed below do not apply equally to all cultures, they will help convey a pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONOCHRONIC PEOPLE</th>
<th>POLYCHRONIC PEOPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do one thing at a time</td>
<td>do many things at once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrate on the job</td>
<td>are highly distractible and subject to interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously</td>
<td>consider time commitments <strong>an objective</strong> to be achieved, if possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are low-context and need information</td>
<td>are high-context and already have information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are committed to the job</td>
<td>are committed to people and human relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adhere religiously to plans</td>
<td>change plans often and easily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy and consideration are more concerned with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy

show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend borrow and lend things often and easily

emphasize promptness base promptness on the relationship

are accustomed to short-term relationships have strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

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**The Relation between Time and Space**

In monochronic time cultures the emphasis is on the compartmentalization of functions and people. Private offices are soundproof if possible. In polychronic Mediterranean cultures, business offices often have large reception areas where people can wait. Company or government officials may even transact their business by moving about in the reception area, stopping to confer with this group and that one until everyone has been attended to.

Polychronic people feel that private space disrupts the flow of information by shutting people off from one another. In polychronic systems, appointments mean very little and may be shifted around even at the last minute to accommodate someone more important in an individual's hierarchy of family, friends, or associates. Polychronic people also have many close friends and good clients with whom they spend a great deal of time. The close links to clients or customers creates a reciprocal feeling of obligation and a mutual desire to be helpful.

**Polychronic Time and Information**

Polychronic people live in a sea of information. They feel they must be up to the minute about everything and everybody, be it business or personal, and they seldom subordinate personal relationships to the exigencies of schedules or budgets.

It is impossible to know how many millions of dollars have been lost in international business because monochronic and polychronic people do not understand each other or even realize that two such different time systems exist.

These two opposing views of time and personal relationships often show up during business meetings. In French meetings the information flow is high, the purpose of the meeting is to create consensus. A rigid agenda and consensus represent opposite goals and do not mix.

**Past- and Future-Oriented Countries**

It is always important to know which segments of the time frame are emphasized. Cultures in countries such as Iran, India, and those of the Far East are past-oriented. Others, such as that of the urban United States, are...
oriented to the present and short-term future; still others, such as those of Latin America, are both past- and present-oriented. In Germany, where historical background is very important, every talk, book, or article begins with background information giving an historical perspective. The Japanese and the French are also steeped in history, but because they are high-context cultures, historical facts are alluded to obliquely. At present, there is no satisfactory explanation for why and how differences of this sort came about.

**Time as communication**

To function effectively in France, Germany, and the United States, it is essential to acquaint oneself with the local language of time. When we take our own time system for granted and project it onto other cultures, we fail to read the hidden messages in the foreign time system and thereby deny ourselves vital feedback.

For Americans, the use of appointment-schedule time reveals how people feel about each other, how significant their business is, and where they rank in the status system. Treatment of time can also convey a powerful form of insult.

It is important, therefore, to know how to read the messages associated with time in other cultures. In France almost everything is polychronic whereas in Germany monochronic promptness is even more important than it is in the United States.

**Tempo, Rhythm, and Synchrony**

Rhythm ties the people of a culture together and can also alienate them from members of other cultures. In some cultures people move very slowly; in others, they move rapidly. When people from two such different cultures meet, they are apt to have difficulty relating because they are not "in sync." This is important because synchrony - the subtle ability to move together - is vital to all collaborative efforts.

People who move at a fast tempo are often perceived as "tail-gating" those who move more slowly, and tailgating doesn't contribute to harmonious interaction - nor does forcing fast-paced people to move too slowly. Americans complain that the Germans take forever to reach decisions. Their time is out of phase with American time and vice versa. One must always be contexted to the local time system. There will be times when everything seems to be at a standstill, but actually a great deal is going on behind the scenes.

**Scheduling and Lead Time**

To conduct business in an orderly manner in other countries, it is essential to know how much or how little lead time is required for each activity: how far ahead to request an appointment or schedule meetings and vacations, and how much time to allow for the preparation of a major report. In both the United States and Germany, schedules are sacred; in France scheduling frequently cannot be initiated until meetings are held with concerned members of the organization to permit essential discussions. This system works well in France, but there are complications whenever overseas partners...
or participants are involved since they have often scheduled their own activities up to two years in advance.

Lead time varies from culture to culture and is itself a communication as well as an element in organization. For instance, in France, if the relationship is important, desks will be cleared when that person arrives, whether there has been any advance notice or not. Time will be made to work together, up to twenty-four hours a day if necessary. In the United States and to some extent in Germany, on the other hand, short lead time means that the business is of little importance; the longer the lead time, the greater the value of the proceedings. In Arab countries, two weeks may be too long; three or four days may be preferable. In Japan lead time is usually much shorter than in the United States.

Another instance of time as communication is the practice of setting a deadline. For example, Americans often schedule how long they will stay in a foreign country for a series of meetings, thus creating the psychological pressure of having to arrive at a decision by a certain date. This is a mistake. The Japanese and, to a lesser degree, the French are very aware of the American pressure of being "under the gun" and will use it to their advantage during negotiations.

The Importance of Proper Timing

Choosing the correct timing of an important event is crucial. Certain times of the day, month, or year are reserved for certain activities (vacations, meal times, etc.) and are not ordinarily interchangeable. In general in northern European cultures and in the United States, anything that occurs outside of business hours, very early in the morning, or late at night suggests an emergency. In France there are times when nothing is expected to happen, such as national holidays and during the month of August, when everything shuts down for vacations.

In the U.S. the short business lunch is common and the business dinner rarer; this is not so in France, where the function of the business lunch and dinner is to create the proper atmosphere and get acquainted. Relaxing with business clients during lunch and after work is crucial to building the close rapport that is absolutely necessary if one is to do business.

Appointments

Since time is highly valued in both Germany and the United States, the messages of time carry more weight than they do in polychronic countries. Waiting time, for example, carries strong messages. In the U.S. only those people with very high status can keep others waiting and get away with it. The waiting-room message is a double-edged sword. Not only does it communicate an attitude towards the visitor, but also it reveals a lot about the individual who has kept a visitor waiting. In monochronic cultures such as those in the U.S. and Germany, keeping others waiting can be a deliberate putdown or a signal that the individual is very disorganized and can't keep to a schedule. In polychronic cultures such as those of France or Hispanic countries, no such message is intended.
The rate of information flow is measured by how long it takes a message intended to produce an action to travel from one part of an organization to another and for that message to release the desired response. Cultural differences in information flow are often the greatest stumbling blocks to international understanding. Every executive doing business in a foreign land should know how information is handled - where it goes and whether it flows easily through the society and the business organization, or whether it is restricted to narrow channels because of compartmentalization.

In low-context countries, such as the United States, Germany, and Switzerland, information is highly focused, compartmentalized, and controlled, and, therefore, not apt to flow freely. In high-context cultures, such as the French, the Japanese, and the Spanish, information spreads rapidly and moves almost as if it had a life of its own.

In high-context cultures, interpersonal contact takes precedence over everything else; wherever people are spatially involved with each other, information flows freely. In business, executives do not seal themselves off behind secretaries and closed doors; in fact in Japan senior executives may even share offices so that each person knows as much about the entire base of operations as possible, and in France an executive will have ties to a centrally located bureau chief to keep a finger on the pulse of information flow.

Organizations where information flows slowly are familiar to both Americans and northern Europeans because low-flow information is associated with both low-context and monochronic time resulting from the compartmentalization associated with low-context institutions and of taking up one thing at a time. In the United States information flows slowly because each executive has a private office and a secretary to serve as a guard. American executives often do not share information with their staff or with other department heads.

The key to being an effective communicator is in knowing the degree of information (contexting) that must be supplied. If you're communicating with a German, remember she or he is low-context and will need lots of information and all the details, in depth. If you're communicating with someone from France, she or he is high-context and won't require as much information. Here are two examples from the interviews:

One German manager working for a French firm was fired after his first year because he didn't perform as expected. The German manager was stunned. His response was, "But nobody told me what they wanted me to do."

The opposite problem was encountered by a Frenchman who resigned from a German firm because he was constantly being told what he already knew by his German superior. Both his intelligence and his pride were threatened.

In both situations, the executives were inept at releasing the right response from their subordinates.
Summary

Speed of messages, context, space, time, information flow, action chains, and interfacing are all involved in the creation of both national and corporate character. In organizations everything management does communicates; when viewed in the cultural context, all acts, all events, all material things have meaning. The cues around which these corporate and cultural messages are organized are as different as the languages with which they are associated.

Many messages are implied or have a cultural meaning, and there is a tacit agreement as to the nature of that meaning which is deeply rooted in the context of the communication. There is much that is taken for granted in culture that few people can explain but which every member of the culture accepts as given. Remember that messages come in many forms (most of them not in words) which are imbedded in the context and in the choice of channels.

Within all cultures there are important unstated differences. Using the wrong format (sending numbers when words are wanted, words when the recipient only feels comfortable with numbers, or words and/or numbers to the visually-oriented person) can only release a negative, frustrated response. The fascinating thing is that the message can be the same in every case. Furthermore, it is quite evident that each culture has its own preferences in this regard.

A television ad that is effective in the United States will have to be translated into a print media message to reach Germans. Germans are print-oriented, which explains in part why there is so little advertising on German TV. Also, Germans are always looking for what is "true" and to them numbers is a way of signaling that a product is exactly as it has been represented. Germans demand facts, facts, and more facts.

It is not uncommon for Americans to experience difficulty getting the French - even those whom they know and have done business with - to reply to inquiries, even urgent ones. This can be exasperating. The reasons are many but most have to do with the importance of immediate human contacts to the French. A solution that succeeds when other methods fail is to use a surrogate to relay messages rather than relying on a letter or a phone call. Why? Because letters and telephone calls aren't personal enough. If you send a properly placed emissary, one whom the individual you are trying to reach likes and trusts and considers important, you add the necessary personal touch to your message and will thereby release the right response.

The French also stress the importance of observing the many rituals of form. If you don't use the right form, the message conveyed is that you are ignorant or ill-mannered or don't care. In any event, the response that is released is almost certain to be negative. Remember that the French deplore casualness and informality. Paying attention to the details and being correct in everything you do is the only tactic that releases the right response in France.

It is not necessary to solve every problem at once, only to show a genuine desire to do so and to take one step at a time, even if it seems to take a lifetime. The rewards are not only material but psychological and mental as well. New frontiers are not only to be found in outer space or in the micro-world of science; they are also at the interfaces between cultures.
### Key Terms

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### Literature


