Chapter 7
Effective Intercultural Communication

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Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice
–Shakespeare, Hamlet

Introduction

Today, effective intercultural communication is a required competency for every professional. Whether you are a global executive, a high potential professional, a member of a global or virtual team, the leader of a local team, a school teacher, lawyer, physician, programmer, plumber, or the owner of the corner bakery or dry cleaner, you are an intercultural communicator. A borderless world demands that you learn to communicate with people who come from many different backgrounds, some with cultural communication patterns that are not at all familiar to you. *Are you an effective intercultural communicator? Are you able to communicate with others, understand them, and be understood? Are you able to get your message across clearly and succinctly? Does your communication demonstrate awareness of, and respect for, the communication needs and preferences of the diverse others with whom you engage?*

Communication, which is culturally learned (Connerley and Pedersen 2005) and begins the moment you make contact with another, always occurs across differences. Sometimes the difference is based on interpersonal style. Sometimes it is based on professional expertise (lawyer, programmer, CEO, nurse, plumber, homemaker) or industry (financial, consumer, telecommunication, education, social services, pharmaceutical). At other times, the differences come from cultural background as described in Chapter 2, or dimensions of social identity (gender, religion, race/ethnicity, and so forth) as described in Chapter 3. Each dimension of diversity—individual, functional or cultural—can serve as a bridge to mutual understanding or as a barrier, increasing the potential for miscommunication.

Communicating across differences is a challenge that has magnified as we live and work with more and more people who come from different places intellectually, emotionally, and culturally. You must effectively respond to a range of differences

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if you want to achieve the goal of clear, respectful communication and expand your capacity for effectiveness and satisfaction. Competence as an intercultural communicator is vital to your ability to address challenges faced on multicultural teams (Matveev and Nelson 2004). Successful communication is an ongoing, dynamic, and active process which always results in mutual understanding. Understanding exists when there is shared meaning of a given behavior, gesture or symbol, or set of behaviors, gestures, or symbols.

While you are accustomed to attending to the content or subject matter of a communication, and even the mode of delivery, you are probably less accustomed to exercising intentional consideration of the cultural identities and orientations of the audience. Intentional consideration of this element, cultural identity, involves understanding your own culture and its influence on how you think and see the world, as well as the cultural norms of other group members (Matveev and Nelson 2004). Thinking about communication in this way may lead to important adjustments in behavior, adjustments designed to demonstrate respect for individual preferences and the cultural customs and expectations of others. Often the required adjustment goes beyond simply offering the current politically correct platitudes. It may require a redefinition of approach and process. Such a result can be achieved by challenging assumptions and developing a broader range of skills and processes for working with an ever-widening circle of people who further inform your perspective (Connerley and Pederson 2005).

The discussion in this chapter is intended to enhance your awareness of the competencies required for effective intercultural communication, on multicultural teams. With enhanced knowledge of intercultural communication, you can become a more effective listener, speaker, team member, and leader.

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the impact of culture on communication
- Communicate interculturally, whether speaking or listening, with confidence and increased comfort
- Understand the assumptions inherent in your own thought processes
- Identify ways to respectfully query others concerning the mental models they utilized in thinking and decision making
- Give and receive feedback

The Functions of Communication on Multicultural Teams

Tirmizi's Multicultural Team Effectiveness Model, described in Chapter 1, indicates that communication, one of the critical team processes, is influenced by societal and institutional factors; organizational factors; team dynamics; and team design.

The quality of a team's communication impacts, even defines, its climate and overall effectiveness. Where communication is effective, trust and commitment seem to be high. Members tend to perform better and express greater satisfaction with their role and participation.

Effective communication is at the heart of high-functioning teams, be they local, global, actual, virtual, cross-cultural, cross-functional, for profit, not for profit, government-sponsored, focused on community development, or corporate. Communication is the mechanism teams use to transfer knowledge, provide information, set direction, understand each other as individuals, ask questions, make decisions, take appropriate action, and simply relate to one another. When communication goes well, the transmission of information is complete: the sender delivers the message, and the receiver understands the message as the sender intended it. Effective communication can motivate you to act and achieve extraordinary results. Communication serves to support information sharing and decision making. It is a required tool for relationship and community building.

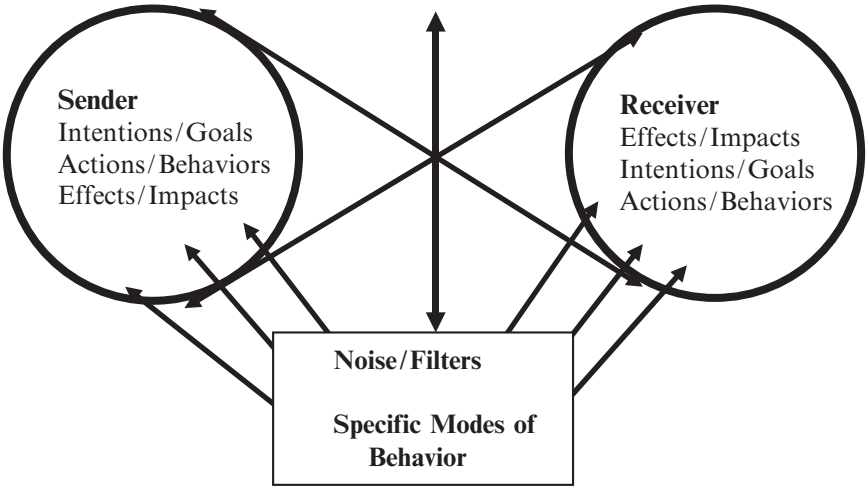
Because team members may come from different parts of the organization, including different geographic locations and divisions, a part of their charge is to bring a wide range of viewpoints and experiences to bear on problems and generate high quality solutions. Team members must have the capacity to communicate well when operating within the boundaries of the team and as they engage with a wider audience. Team communication goes well beyond what happens within the confines of the team. As they move back into their part of the organization, members must effectively communicate and sell the solution to local colleagues, on behalf of the team. The group's results and impact ripple out into the rest of the organization.

Multicultural teams face some particular challenges, above and beyond bridging from one set of personality preferences to another. Multicultural teams must bridge across cultures, with each culture having its own specific mental models and even language differences. This set of challenges adds layers of complexity to the work of effective communication in the intercultural context. A core process of teams (see Chapter 1) and a critical skill set for cross-cultural competence, effective communication is at the heart of individual and team effectiveness. *So, how does this process work? What are its component parts? What facilitates shared understanding, and what gets in the way?*

A Communication Model

Communication is a complex process, as shown by the traditional model of communication in Fig. 7.1. It involves a sender, a receiver, environmental factors, as well as personal and cultural filters. All of these elements affect both the sender and the receiver. Clarity of the message is driven by the words you choose to use and the accompanying nonverbal behaviors, including posture, tone of voice, eye contact, rhythm of breath, timing, and delivery of the message.

Intentions/Goals	Medium of Communication	Effects/Impact
Wishes	Face-to-face witnessing	Happy
Wants	Telephone	Sad
Hopes	Memos/Letters	Hurt
Desires	Email	Angry
Fears	Teleconferences	Anxious
	Satellite/Webcasts/Webinars, etc.	Joyful



Actions/Behaviors	Noise/Filters	
Content	Distrust	Education
Word Choices	Suspicions	Socio-economic
Voice	Assumptions	Class
Tone	Pre-Judgments	Experience
Accent	Status	Socialization
Nonverbals	Culture	Stereotype
	Emotions	

Fig. 7.1 A traditional communication model

As the sender formulates a message, her or his filters influence the content of the message and the way in which it is delivered. When the sender conveys the message, it encounters the receiver's filters. The receiver's filters are made up of personality preferences and values, in addition to being shaped by all dimensions of cultural diversity. The filters, also called noise, color and shape how the sender constructs the message and how the receiver interprets the message. This noise influences the content and meaning of the message. In a two-person interaction, when both people are from the same cultural background, the filters operating in their communication are primarily their

individual personality preferences or style differences (see Chapter 3). For example, in the USA, for some people the word confrontation invokes images of a fight, a battle. For others, the word simply means that we are engaging in a dialogue about an issue that is difficult to discuss and a change in behavior is required. When you move across cultures, the layers and content of filters increase and become more complex. Interculturally, noise may involve a range of filters, such as mental models; prejudices and stereotypes; language and dialect differences; embellishment of information; level of animation; pacing and use of silence; directness of the message; formality of speech, as well as vocal tone and physical proximity. All of these filters create noise and potential interference, making communication even more challenging.

The specific meaning assigned to a particular behavior can vary within and across cultures. The same behavior can have an entirely different meaning in one culture than in another. For example, in the USA, when listening, shaking your head from side to side generally signals disagreement. Nodding your head in an up and down motion usually indicates agreement. In parts of India, head movement simply means that the person is engaged in listening. It is not the expression of an opinion, in favor of, nor in disagreement with the message. Without cross-cultural awareness of the meaning of specific nonverbal behavior, confusion and frustration abound.

The traditional communication model presented here is a mechanical description of an interactive, fluid, seamless, reflexive process. Much of what is depicted happens at rapid speed and, seemingly, involuntarily. The process begins with the sender, who has an important message to deliver. The message has as its goal the communication of a particular intention or idea. Looking out at the audience, be it one person or many people, the sender perceives them through a unique set of filters. The filters are specific to the sender's personal and cultural lens *and* to the individual or group that is the intended recipient of the message. If the individual or make-up of the group were different, the operative filters might also vary. The sender's filters include assumptions, history, fears, stereotypes, and the like about the individual or group with whom she is communicating. Her filters influence her word choices and all attendant behaviors, determining the pace of her speech, her tone of voice, the imagery she chooses to use, whether she sits or stands when delivering the message, the degree of formality of the communication, the way she holds her body, the depth and pace of her breathing, and so on.

Whatever the medium of communication—a face-to-face interaction, a telephone exchange, an email, or a videoconference—the sender's message lands in the world of the receiver, where it passes through filters. If the receiver is a group, the message passes through each group member's filters. The degree of understanding will vary depending upon the strength and intensity of the listener's filters. In groups, one person's filters will interact with those of another as people exchange their understanding of the meaning they have made of the sender's message. Naturally, everyone present will have their own interpretation of the message. In a team meeting of 25 participants, the sender is likely to experience several interpretations of the message. Some of the interpretations will be dramatically different from the sender's

intention. Others will reflect subtle variations, some of which may be nearly imperceptible, until the receiver takes action. Then, the difference in interpretation becomes crystal clear. During a discussion, subtle differences seem meaningless. When acted upon, they become glaring. Investigating the subtleties is as important as delving into the more dramatic differences. In fact, the more dramatic the difference, the earlier the reality of the miscommunication tends to present itself, allowing for redirection. Subtleties often make themselves apparent much later in the process and so are more challenging to redirect before major disruption occurs. For example, if you ask team members to conduct two interviews to gather data on some relevant questions, the directions sound clear and straightforward. Yet, the potential for a subtle misunderstanding exists. Are you to conduct two interviews of two different people or two interviews of the same person at two different phases of the process? Another example might involve a Muslim colleague who says "Yes, if it is God's will." The non-Muslin colleague may hear this as a hopeful "Yes." Yet, the Muslim colleague may be respectfully expressing a lack of commitment which will not clearly present itself until the expected results are not delivered.

In Chapters 2 and 3 the authors discuss values, acknowledging that they differ from individual to individual and across cultures. *How do your values, individual and cultural, shape your communication? What are your individual and cultural filters? What has been their impact on your effectiveness when communicating across cultures?*

Both your style and your cultural differences can affect the way you hear others, and it can shape the way you construct and convey a message. Certainly the way a message is conveyed to a person who comes from a Collectivism orientation versus someone from an Individualism orientation (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 2000) would, by necessity, have to be different in order to achieve understanding and create alignment. For example, if the goal is to streamline a process, the message to the Collectivist would probably need to clearly describe how the change will affect all parties involved and demonstrate that the design and implementation plan serve the good of the whole team or system. The Individualist would most likely be motivated by hearing how the process will ease the burden in his functional area or lead to cost savings for the company, though it may have an adverse impact on some areas of the operation. To get buy-in to the goals of the project, the effective communicator must convey the goals in a way that addresses the needs and motivational levers of all team members, accounting for individual and cultural preferences.

Cultural stereotypes you hold about both individual and group differences, as addressed in Chapters 2 and 3, can lead to breakdowns in communication. For example, if a team member has a pattern of over-talking a point, other team members will often tune out as the individual speaks. The tuning out is felt by the individual, causing him to talk more because he wants to be heard, acknowledged, and understood. As the individual talks more, the team tunes him out even more. The cycle is vicious. How team members treat each other can facilitate communication and inclusion or lead to their disintegration. Considering this same behavior pattern, I have often noticed that over-talking by men is more easily tolerated than when the same behavior is exhibited by women. Women who over-talk are often

talked over and therefore interrupted (Tannen 1990); (Tingley 1994). Men who over-talk are usually allowed to finish speaking but perhaps no one responds to what they have said or their comments are simply acknowledged in a cursory fashion before someone transitions the team, redirecting focus. *What are some examples of communication barriers and breakdowns in the workplace? How do both individual and cultural differences lead to, or exacerbate, the presence and impact of communication barriers and breakdowns? In what ways have your preferences, individual and/or cultural, contributed to communication barriers or breakdowns on a team of which you have been a member?*

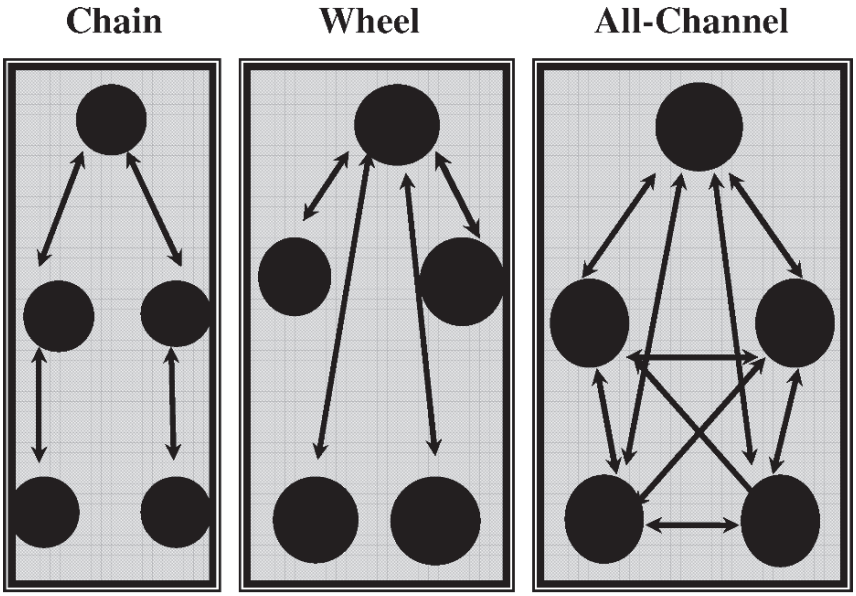
Formal and Informal Communication

Teams use various types of communication, to communicate both within the team and to other parts of the organization. At times, formal communication is called for, communication that follows the official chain of command or is part of the expected discussing and reporting that must be done to comply with the sanctioned organizational expectations or protocol. Formal communication, which usually involves announcements, written work plans, documentation of meeting output and new procedures, progress reports, presentations and recommendations, is engaged in most often in response to expectations of the organization's hierarchy and/or reporting structure.

In most organizations, the informal communication network is much more powerful than the formal process. It is where issues are negotiated and resolved. It is where agreements are reached and decisions are made. The informal communication network has the power to advance initiatives or derail them. All of the hurdles of the formal organization are surmounted by effectively navigating the informal communication system. Since all results are created through the efforts of people who decide to lend their support, teams that constructively use their influence through the informal channels create results faster. They satisfy the social needs of the organization, communicating alignment with business goals and respecting the political nuances of the system.

Communication Structures Used by Teams

There are several types of communication structures used by teams. As pictured in Fig. 7.2 (Fisher 1980), they include the chain, the wheel, and the all-channel networks. The *chain* reflects the traditional hierarchy, with communication flowing toward the formal chain of command, moving up and down the chain in a siloed fashion. In the *wheel* formation, communication flows in and out of the team through the leader. The leader is the center of the hub and transmits information to team members and other groups. The chain and wheel both require that information



Criteria	Chain	Wheel	All-Channel
Speed	Moderate	Fast	Fast
Accuracy	High	High	Moderate
Emergence of Leader	Moderate	High	None
Member Satisfaction	Moderate	Low	High

Fig. 7.2 Communication structures and their effectiveness (Fisher 1980)

flow to a central point before it can be passed on to others. In these networks, communication requires more time. In the *all-channel* structure, communication flows freely among all members of the work team and out to the organization, as appropriate.

Teams benefit from making an explicit decision about the type of communication processes and structure they will use. The decision needs to be made with consideration for:

- The team's purpose and anticipated lifespan
- The structure of the team—hierarchical, flat, shared leadership, or self-managed
- The frequency of team meetings
- The individual communication and social needs of all team members
- Organizational expectations on communication from the team

The communication structure chosen should support the efficient and effective exchange of information, promoting understanding and facilitating right action.

Each structure has its inherent strengths and challenges. In terms of team member satisfaction, an important measure of team effectiveness, the all-channel network reports the highest degree of member involvement, energy, and motivation. It is also the one model in which leadership is more easily shared. Its power structure tends to remain flat. New teams may find the all-channel network to be most effective since all members are equally linked into the communication process. As teams develop, the preferred structure could change as member needs concerning issues of distance and centrality change (Fisher 1980).

Modes of Communication

High- and Low-Context Cultures

Culture plays a critical role in shaping team members' mental models (Adler 2001) and behavior. Accordingly, it stands to reason that the culture of each team member will have a significant effect on the way in which the team communicates. The skilled team member aims to understand the culture of his or her colleagues and their approach to relationships and tasks, as well as their approach to teamwork and decision making. Based on that understanding and knowledge, the wise team member makes adjustments in his or her communication style (Matveev and Nelson 2004).

As described in Chapter 2, anthropologist Edward Hall (1977) asserts that cultures exist on a continuum that reflects the degree, high to low, to which its members relate to context or the interrelated social and cultural conditions that surround and influence the mindset and behavior of an individual, organization, community, or society.

As documented by Halverson (1993), in low-context cultures such as Scandinavia and Germany, the message or communication depends on the words that are spoken, with little if any use of or emphasis on the meaning of the nonverbal elements of the communication. The verbal message tends to be direct and explicit. Things are spelled out in exact terms. The words are the message and, accordingly, are to be taken literally. Speed and efficiency in conveying the relevant facts and completing the interaction are of greatest importance, whether through an oral or written exchange.

High-context cultures use nonverbal communication as a powerful and vital part of the exchange. Significant meaning is conveyed through tone, gestures, facial expressions, posture, social status, history, the setting, even physical proximity and contact. While the verbal content of the message is implied, the power and importance of the conversation are related to the people, the situation, and the nonverbal elements. People speak, embellishing the point. Communication is seen and experienced as an art form and a way of engaging and connecting with others. Such exchanges lend themselves to oral communication and therefore, require time.

A meeting among women who, across cultures, tend to be high context in orientation will involve discussion of family and friends, an update on the people and current events in their lives, discussion of current challenges, and plans for the weekend or holiday. A request for similar information from the others present is a given. A similar kind of give-and-take relational dynamic would exist in a meeting or gathering among a group of Africans or Asians, whatever their gender. There is an interest in engaging and learning about the other. Face-to-face, or at least voice-to-voice, best enables this quality of interaction.

In her Cultural Context Chart, Halverson (1993) presents a discussion of interactions in high- and low-context cultures. Pay close attention to the information presented in Table 7.1. It provides useful insight into key dimensions of communication within high and low cultural contexts.

Not only is the style of communication different in high- and low-context cultures, the reasons for communicating are also different. Communication in high-context cultures appears to be more about the connection between people, the trust that evolves and the relationship that develops, *over time*. The first goal of the interaction is to know and connect with the other. In low-context cultures, the goal is to get the task done. Relationships begin and end and are seen as expedient, enabling a result. Then, *if* time permits, socializing and relating on a personal level can occur.

The High-Low Context model of cultures is useful in that it awakens awareness to the valid uniqueness and communication style of these cultural orientations. With this knowledge, constructive choices can be made about how and when to

Table 7.1 Cultural-context chart: Interaction (Halverson 1993)

High-context culture	Low-context culture
High use of nonverbal communication: Voice tone, facial expression, gesture, and eye expression carry significant parts of conversation	Low use of nonverbal communication: Message is carried more by words than by nonverbal means
Message implicit: Verbal message is implicit—the context is more important (situation, people, nonverbals)	Message explicit: Verbal message is explicit, and the context is less important
Indirect: The point is embellished and communication is circular	Direct: Things are spelled out exactly
Message is art form: Communication is seen as an art form, a way of engaging the person	Message is literal: Communication is seen as a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions
Disagreement is personalized: Sensitivity to conflict that another's nonverbal communication suggests. Conflict must be solved before work can progress or avoided because it is too personal	Disagreement depersonalized: Focus on rational solutions rather than personal ones, direct attention to others' bothersome behavior, and getting on with the task

communicate with others in ways that empower individuals and teams to become high functioning. When coming from a low-context culture, and working on a team with members who are from high-context environments, it is wise to be mindful of how meeting agendas are planned. In order to build an inclusive and comfortable communication environment for everyone, more time needs to be structured into the meeting design so that the relational connections can *begin*.

The success of the work and the health and vitality of the team is facilitated through team members' flexibility and acknowledgment of the different communication needs that exist on the team.

This pattern of difference in approach to communication—high/low context—will also affect the pace of the meeting, the way in which learning occurs, the preferred mode of communication, and all aspects of interactions. Low-context members of the team will do well to hear explicit instructions, spelled out clearly. Letters, memos, faxes, and e-mails are seen as perfectly appropriate. High-context team members' understanding will be enhanced if they hear instructions *and* have ample opportunity to discuss the information. Face-to-face interaction is preferred, allowing them to contextualize the interaction. On cross-cultural teams, meeting schedules need to include a variety of approaches and sufficient time to accommodate different needs and orientations. In many situations, providing oral and written instructions, coupled with time for demonstration, is of critical importance because it serves to reinforce understanding, particularly when language differences are present. Patience must be developed and exercised, as high- and low-context team members come together. *Are you a high- or low-context communicator? What is the impact of your orientation and communication style on teams? What can you do to modify your approach to communication, to support your colleagues whose orientations are different?*

Culture as Mirror Images

Charles M. Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (2000), in their book *Building Cross-cultural Competence*, present the idea that cultures share many of the same values and conceptions, though they have simply made different choices in how their values are sequenced (see Chapter 2).

Universalism emphasizes that which applies to a universe of people, while *Particularism* emphasizes the exceptions to the rule. Communication that spans this potential gap will need to address the universal rule, demonstrating fairness and sameness in application of the rule for all. The communication must also account for the particular exceptions and indicate the ways in which the rule is actually a guideline for establishing a more specific, unique agreement (Walker et al. 2003). In other words, communication will need to encompass both perspectives in order to address the needs and interests of all concerned. Effective communication will need to speak to that which is shared, the points of similarity and overlap, and that which is different and unique. With both orientations represented, it becomes apparent that all needs are considered. The experience of inclusion is more likely to result.

An *Individualist* orientation emphasizes the degree to which individual goals are valued over collective or group goals. Team members from Individualist cultures may have an intense focus on maximizing profits through the efforts of the team. They may push for the team to take risks and find creative, innovative approaches to business challenges. Their colleagues from Collectivist cultures may be more focused on the impact of the team's efforts on market share and customer satisfaction. They may suggest a business strategy that results in diminished profits in order to gain customer loyalty and capture market share. They might suggest this approach as a long-term strategy, enabling the company to capture an entire market. Japanese companies have often employed this approach. Team goals and agendas must account for what each orientation values and on what it places priority.

Specificity emphasizes precision, analysis, and getting to the point, while *Diffuseness* looks to the whole, the larger context. In communication, specificity orientation suggests that the starting point is with specifics (low context) and then the communication spins outward to include relationships. Diffuseness starts at the periphery (high context), relating broadly and then moves inward to encompass the specific aims. Communication styles that are specificity-oriented tend to be direct, forceful, and blunt, and may even be experienced as confrontational. Getting the message across is more important than the risk of offending the other. In the case of Diffuseness orientation, communication is more indirect. The sender of the message tends to drop hints, pointing in the direction of the core message and allowing the listener to interpret the message. The speaker tends to walk softly, hoping that the fullness of the message will be understood. Specificity can be likened to the orientation and practices of low-context cultures described previously. Diffuseness parallels the pattern of high-context cultures. In my experience, women, across cultures, tend to be more diffuse in their approach to communication. The style of men tends to parallel the cultural pattern of the nation with which they identify.

Trompenaars' (2000) model is a powerful tool for diverse teams. It suggests that diversity is an advantage since what a member of one cultural orientation misses seeing, the other sees in bold relief. The diverse team is able to see in multiple directions and communicate outward in ways that will capture the broadest numbers of constituents.

Each of these value perspectives is held by at least half of the world's population. On global teams, as well as local teams, differences in the order of values are bound to surface and impact the communication and work process. The response that is called for is to embrace the full spectrum of the continuum and explore issues using a holistic and inclusive approach. This mindset is essential as you work and communicate across individual differences and across cultures.

Virtual Teams and Communication

Today, many teams are virtual, brought together by technology. Technologies enable collaboration, information sharing, and decision making. While having reduced the constraints of time and distance, technology has left in place many of the old

communication challenges. With most technology, context and nonverbal cues are dramatically reduced or distorted. Since nonverbal cues, tone of voice, and body language account for over 90% of the impact of communication (Mehrabian, 1981), much important information is lost. When we add the complexity of the use of technology to the inherent challenges of differences in first languages, idiomatic and colloquial expressions, as well as accents, the task of understanding each other becomes daunting. The absence of contextual information can lead to assuming a level of similarity between self and others that does not actually exist. Virtual teams have to find means, as they utilize global communication tools, to adjust their ways of communicating and understanding to fit the cultures involved (Adler 2001). *What techniques and approaches have you found to be most successful, across cultures, in making virtual meetings effective, particularly when there is not a shared first language? What can virtual teams do to mitigate the impact of diminished contextual information?*

Varner (2006) states that an individual's position in an organization has more of an effect on communication preferences and style than does the person's cultural background. Varner gives the example of computer programmers, who may prefer electronic communication with low levels of personal contact, regardless of their individual ethnicities. Electronic communication may be especially effective for diverse teams, depending on the task. Empirical studies have found that electronic communication produces greater heterogeneity in ideas and opinions (Enayati 2001). Both visible and deep-level diversity are somewhat neutralized by electronic communication. Nonverbal communication is essentially nonexistent, so team members can contribute without fearing a glance at the clock, a shrug, or a frown from another team member. E-mail is not appropriate for tasks requiring complex decision making. Therefore, the choice of a communication medium depends on team member preferences derived from organizational culture, as well as other cultural affiliations, and the complexity of the task. *Do you consider the neutralization of diversity on virtual teams to be a benefit or a detriment to the team's success?*

Nancy Adler (2001) suggests that intercultural communicators present messages through multiple channels, from visual aids to paraphrasing to summary statements. One team comprised predominantly of US and Swedish citizens applied Adler's recommendations. It began publishing a full agenda, complete with each speaker's key talking points, in advance of the meeting. The visual information, used as a point of reference during the meeting, proved to be helpful, providing clarity and focus. Pre-meeting notes, combined with the live teleconference or videoconference discussion and a post-meeting document that captured the key points of the discussion, emphasizing action items and decisions, supported a substantial improvement in the accuracy of the team's communications, its efficient use of time, and a higher level of involvement from all participants. A team that was floundering due to a lack of full participation and rampant misconceptions of purpose became high performing. Member satisfaction and productivity trended upward. *Have you ever been on a virtual team? What were or are your team's communication challenges? What are some strategies or processes your team utilized to improve communication and mutual understanding?*

Considerations Concerning a Team's Communication Culture

The business of effective communication in an intercultural context requires thought and effort. The current, familiar way of operating and the rules that govern the reasons people communicate, as well as the way in which they communicate, will expand and change. New rules and patterns will be created. Those who are receptive to change will be the beneficiaries of learning and enhanced competence. Their effectiveness and value will increase.

Every team, intentionally and unintentionally, develops its own communication culture. When team members come from many places around the world or organization, the team's culture will be influenced by a multiplicity of experiences and preferences. High-functioning teams will establish an explicit culture, inclusive of a set of communication norms created by the group. The norms may be developed intentionally or may simply emerge as the group's life evolves. The more conscious the group can be of the norms it adopts and acts on, the more opportunities it has to choose which norms it will utilize in support of optimal communication and functioning. When a multicultural team develops operational norms that reflect the values and needs of its diverse membership, it is said to have developed a hybrid culture (Earley and Mosakowski 2000). The new team culture results from the overlapping cultures of its members. Hybrid cultures facilitate a strong sense of inclusion and foster mutual understanding.

When a team and team members are new to one another, it is reasonable for them to call upon what they understand about the culture of team members in order to make an educated guess about the most effective way to communicate with others (Adler 2001). As the team develops, it will evolve its own culture. Below are some specific considerations teams should explore. When properly implemented, these considerations help individuals and teams to become effective cross-cultural communicators.

Open-Mindedness

Open-mindedness helps to reduce the noise and filters in communication, increasing your ability and willingness to work well with others. Taking and holding a "position" gets in the way of seeing options and objectively considering their value. Open-mindedness holds the key to creativity (Von Oech 1998). It asks you to disengage from the "tried and true" and engage your ability to dream and imagine other realities, other ways of making things work. It invites you to push the boundaries, ask new questions, and allow creativity to flow without judgment or evaluation.

Open-mindedness facilitates listening, a critical communication skill, particularly in a cross-cultural context. In my experience, open-mindedness enables you to listen with your heart. In listening with the heart, you are better able to identify

the place where you join with others, in spite of apparent differences. The contrast between people who are open-minded and those who are closed-minded is striking.

Open-mindedness helps to create a spirit of inclusion and excitement. Open-minded team members are more magnetic and influential than their counterparts. As communicators, they flex and flow to get things done. Others enjoy working with them and are stimulated by their energy and confidence. *Are you open-minded? What would it take for you to become an even more open-minded communicator? What would increase your level of open-mindedness, adding to your value and potential contribution? What can you do to encourage greater open-mindedness on the teams with which you work?*

Self-Awareness in the One Up/One Down Communication Dynamic

Many times, the challenges of the one-up/one-down dynamic in relationships (see Chapter 3) present themselves through a person's communication patterns. When you are one-up in terms of individual style or cultural group identity, you can easily slip into communicating with the one-down group member in a way that is condescending or puts the person in a subordinate position. You may speak over the one-down group member or correct what the person says or allow air time but not build on the comments or give them space and attention in the group's discussion process. In the one-up position, the individual whose culture is the prevailing one has the marked advantage of feeling relaxed, knowledgeable, in control, empowered, and powerful. The individual is advantaged through familiarity, privileged to make or know the rules for communicating and relating.

The one-down group member responds to the communication rules set by others. The territory is unfamiliar, presenting a psychological and practical disadvantage. Functioning may be diminished and constrained. Substantial energy is required to raise the experience of feeling one-down to the attention of others and deal with anticipated resistance in a way that does not damage the relationship. A cue for discerning when you are in the one-down position is when you have the thought that raising the issue of feeling one-down would be more work than it would be worth.

One-up group members can unconsciously behave in ways that shut down the voice and diminish the presence and contribution of one-down group members. The one-down group member feels marginalized, invisible, or too visible. The individual can begin to feel that it is too hard to push against the tide of the powerful ones who expect certain behavior. In reaction to the one-down group member's presence, the one-up group members may sometimes become patronizing. These are all barriers to authentic, effective communication.

In order to truly demonstrate that you value another, you must believe that all parties in an exchange are equally important and significant. I believe that all people, as human beings, have an equal right to be heard and understood. The proof of your values and beliefs is in your behavior, every day, moment to moment. The test is the degree to which your daily behavior offers tangible evidence to seeing, believing, and acting in ways that demonstrate that another's way of being is as correct as your own way of being.

When self-aware, you are conscious of your belief systems and behaviors (see Social Intelligence discussion in Chapter 3). Becoming conscious of the times when you are in the one-up position and the times when you are in the one-down position, holds many lessons concerning how to engage with others so that the power dynamics of one-up/one-down do not become the defining dimensions of your communication pattern and relationships.

Self-awareness requires deep knowledge of your behavioral tendencies, emotions, cultural conditioning, values and mindsets, idiosyncrasies, strengths and development needs (Adler 2001). Self-aware people are in tune with themselves *and* others. They are able to discern their motivation for acting in a given way and can listen to and learn from how others see them. The self-aware individual is usually a confident and competent person. *Are you self-aware? To what degree? What have been some situations in which you demonstrated self-awareness? What was the impact of your behavior? In what ways do you need to enhance your level of self-awareness?*

The Johari Window: A Tool for Enhancing Self-Awareness

Self-awareness can be enhanced. One simple model that teams and individuals can use to foster increased self-awareness is the Johari Window (Luft and Ingham 1955), Figure 7.3. It encourages you to be *Open,* to reveal information that is *Hidden* and not known to others, and to become aware of your *Blind Spot*. The Johari Window encourages an open exchange of information through self-disclosure and feedback. Receiving feedback is the primary tool available for diminishing the size and effect of your *Blind Spot*. The task of shrinking the size of your *Blind Spot*, learning what you do not know about yourself, is a worthy challenge. The more you are open to learning about yourself, the more likely you are to increase your capacity. The *Unknown* area shrinks accordingly. Learning requires personal courage, but is necessary as you work across cultures because there is so much that you do not know *and* are not aware that you do not know. The Johari Window supports you in increasing your level of Social Intelligence by providing you with insight into yourself.

The Johari Window, when used to enhance self-awareness, can stimulate interesting, useful dialogue, one-on-one or among members of a team. With the goal of expanding the size of the Open area, the primary techniques used are self-disclosure and feedback. Self-disclosure, telling others about yourself, places what is in the Hidden area out in the open. Feedback provides a constructive avenue for others to share their perceptions of you or the impact your behavior has had on them and/or the team. Feedback enables you to learn what may be in your Blind Spot.

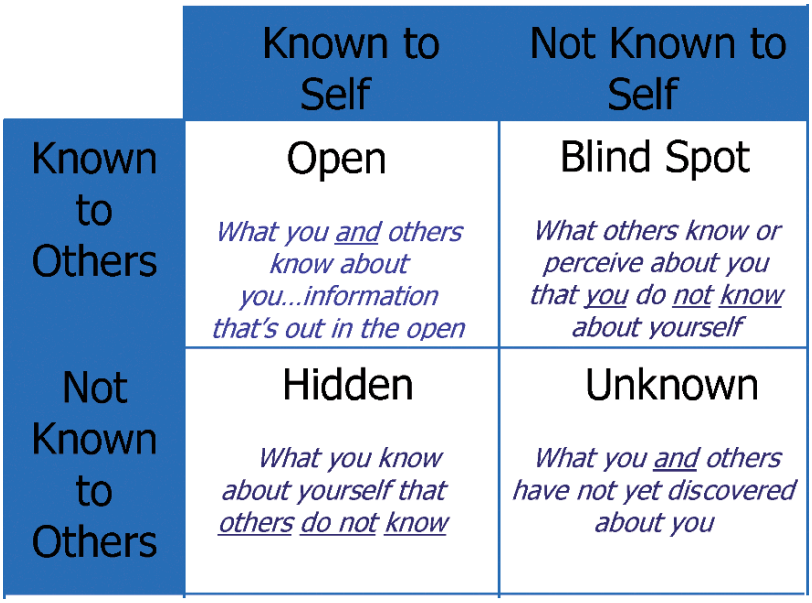


Fig. 7.3 Johari window (Luft and Ingham 1955)

The depth and breadth of information about you that is out in the Open area may depend upon how long you have known the other or been a member of the team, the team's norms concerning self-disclosure, as well as your comfort, personally and culturally, in talking about yourself and making "public" information that may, to you, seem private or not relevant or appropriate to share in a work context. Certainly, you will decide what information you share and when you will expose any aspect of the Hidden area. You will also make mindful choices concerning from whom and when you will ask for feedback, opening up your ability to see into your Blind Spot(s). To one degree or another, you can make the Johari Window an active part of your strategy for enhanced self-awareness and positively impact your team's communication culture, enabling increased levels of openness through appropriate, respectful self-disclosure and feedback.

Here is an exercise you can use when you want to improve a relationship by sharing more information about yourself (Open and Hidden) and learning more about another or others, including how they see and experience you (Blind Spot).

You and another person, or you and your team members, can use the statements and questions in Fig. 7.4 to disclose the kinds of information suggested in the Open, Hidden, and Unknown panes of the window and request feedback on the kinds of questions noted in the Blind Spot. This exercise has the potential to open a window to increased self-awareness and enhanced competency. Keep in mind that what is comfortably revealed in one culture may be considered private and inappropriate for discussion in another. For example, women may be comfortable revealing emotional feelings about a topic, while men may be unable to identify specific feelings with the same ease, or may be less comfortable sharing such information.

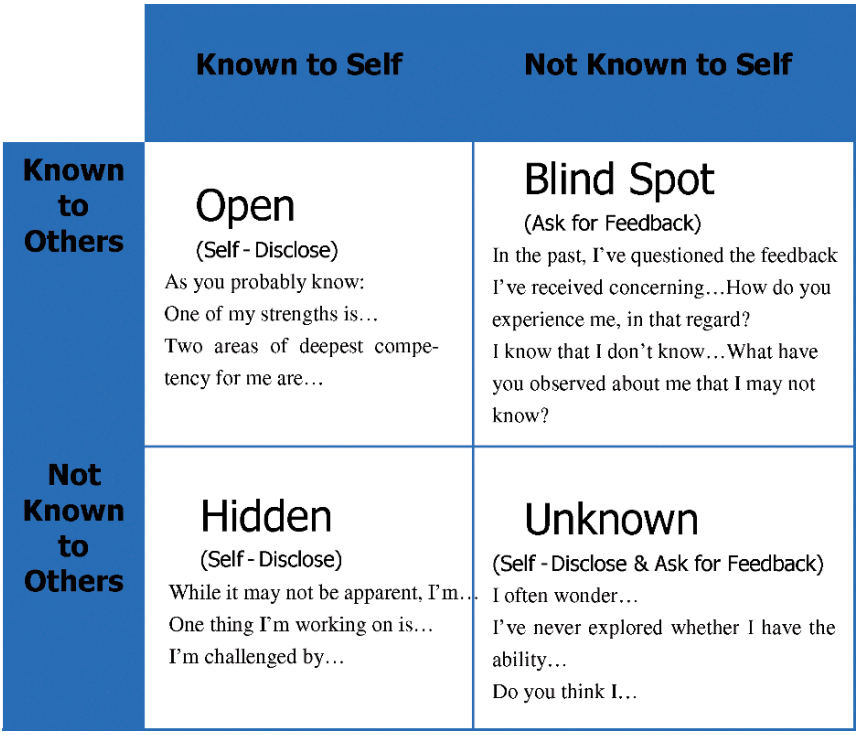


Fig. 7.4 Expanding the open pane through self-disclosure and feedback

As a woman of African descent, born and raised in the USA, I know that some African-Americans may be reluctant to openly share information with their white colleagues concerning the details of their lives. Backed by a history of one-down group membership, there can be lingering concern about how personal information may be used or misused, and the impact it may have on reputation and career opportunities.

Cultural tradition, as well as group and personal history, influence what and with whom you and others are comfortable sharing. *What kind of information are you willing to share in the workplace? How do your personal and cultural backgrounds influence your preference?*

Enhancing Competency as an Intercultural Communicator

Whether it is in your home, same-race community, same-religion, or same-gender gathering, or same-sexual orientation grouping, there are individual differences in communication style, needs, and expectations. In our multicultural world, differences are unavoidable and require a respectful, considered response if you want to be an

effective, competent intercultural communicator. One model, which delineates several areas of required competence, is presented in the following section of this chapter.

The 3C Model

Competence as an intercultural communicator is a critical leverage point for all teamwork (Matveev and Nelson 2004). Matveev and Nelson provide additional perspective on this subject through discussion of their 3C Model. Here, in Table 7.2, Matveev highlights four dimensions of competence for the cross-cultural communicator. They include Interpersonal Skills, Team Effectiveness, Cultural Uncertainty, and Cultural Empathy.

Matveev's work, along with that of many others, suggests that communication, be it visual, verbal, written, sitting in silence, or contact across the ethers through the Internet or satellite links, is most effective when you are mindful. Mindful communication requires that you engage with the intention of being clearly understood and causing no harm to the relationship. Such goals suggest the need for awareness of what is likely to be most effective with a particular individual and/or what is culturally appropriate, given the context in which the communication occurs and

Table 7.2 The 3C model for cross-cultural communication competence (Matveev et al. 2001 in Matveev and Nelson 2004)

Interpersonal skills	Team effectiveness	Cultural uncertainty	Cultural empathy
Ability to acknowledge differences in communication and interaction styles	Ability to understand and define team goals, roles, and norms	Ability to deal with cultural uncertainty. Ability to display patience	Ability to see and understand the world from another's cultural perspective
Ability to deal with misunderstandings	Ability to give and receive constructive feedback	Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty due to cultural differences	Exhibiting a spirit of inquiry about other cultures, values, beliefs, and communication patterns
Comfort when communicating with foreign nationals	Ability to discuss and solve problems	Openness to cultural differences	Ability to appreciate dissimilar working styles
Awareness of your own cultural conditioning	Ability to deal with conflicts. Ability to display respect for other team members	Willingness to accept change and risk	Ability to accept different ways of doing things
Basic knowledge about the country, culture, and language of team members	Participatory leadership style. Ability to work cooperatively with others	Ability to exercise flexibility	Nonjudgmental stance toward the way things are done in other cultures

the cultural background of the listener(s). Awareness, achieved through mindfulness—intentionally devoting thought and mental attention to a matter—leads to enhanced effectiveness. A number of ways of thinking, and behaving facilitate improvement in communication skills, in all contexts.

The following section presents some helpful ways of thinking and behaving, when interacting cross-culturally. The author calls these important mindsets - mental attitudes or predispositions which establish an inclination or habitual response to a given situation. As you read this section, consider:

- What are some of the mindsets, or mental attitudes, which undergird your approach to cross-cultural communication?
- How do they impact your effectiveness?
- In what ways might you modify your mindsets for increased effectiveness?

Important Overarching Mindsets and Behaviors

A number of ways of thinking, mindsets, and behaving facilitate improvement in communication skills, in all contexts. When communicating within your cultural context, across cultures, one-on-one, or in teams, each of these mindsets will strengthen your competence as an intercultural communicator. Consistent utilization of the mindsets requires self-discipline. With self-discipline, more thought can be given to every interaction and a more conscious, mindful response developed. The assessment at the end of this chapter lists these mindsets and behaviors. Embed them into your daily behavior. Allow these mindsets and behaviors to support you in communicating effectively as you lead and influence others, as you relate to your family and friends, even as you reach across boundaries to interact with strangers. Because they facilitate the reduction of noise and minimize filters, these mindsets and behaviors enable sender and receiver to communicate with greater mutual understanding and respect. Many of the mindsets and behaviors suggested, all of which can be developed, resemble those of high-context cultures, inviting you to move closer to the mirror image of low context cultures, expanding competence and confidence as intercultural communicator. Thoughts and beliefs guide behavior choices. Accordingly, there are several mindsets that are useful for the intercultural communicator to adopt and use as a guide for expanding curiosity and strengthen the ability to reach through the boundaries of ones own culture to the culture of others.

First, the intercultural communicator must be committed to communicating effectively across cultures, facilitating an environment of mutual understanding and respect. Commitment is required to sustain your efforts through times of frustration and uncertainty.

Experience suggests the need for the intercultural communicator to exercise patience with self and others. Mistakes are often made. Forgiveness is required. Communicating across cultures takes a significant amount of energy and effort, as well as time. Speaking and comprehending the messages received is particularly energy draining whenever you are communicating in a language that is not your native tongue. This challenge is present even when you are fluent in that language.

When you are self-aware, and conscious of whom the other is personally and culturally, you can more consistently communicate with a quality of openness described in the Johari Window and acknowledge differences. Doing so can help to diminish the possibility of tension or conflict arising, born out of the differences. The simple act of acknowledging cultural differences may open the gateway to increased comfort and understanding. *When have you openly acknowledged cultural differences with another person? How did acknowledging the differences impact communication and understanding?*

A powerful and challenging practice is to clarify the core values that underlie any important communication or project, particularly when conflict may result. This practice enables you to focus on the deeper intentions, the core values, which are to be reflected in the message or project. The core values then become the touchstone for all actions and decisions, making it easier to be creative, solve problems, and reach consensus. One multinational team, charged with designing a new, organization-wide leadership model, reached an impasse as they struggled to define critical dimensions of leadership effectiveness. Release from deadlock occurred when team members clarified the core values they wanted leaders to exhibit. For example, aware of the impact of cultural differences on their understanding and ability to reach consensus, they acknowledged that leading with passion would look one way in Japan, and yet a different way in Egypt, Sweden, and Germany. They found a bridge to success once they made the core values their focus.

If you take a macro view, you see that people share the same core values, although the way they act them out may vary greatly. If you insist that everyone behaves in exactly the same way, you lose critical sparks of creative energy and become entangled in the web of the particulars. If you discipline yourself to connect with the core values you share with others, you can more readily find points of agreement and handle the particulars in ways that work best for each specific context.

Adler (2001) suggests that the effective intercultural communicator knows that there is much that is not known. To that end, it is important to be a learner, with deep curiosity. Actively ask the other about his or her customs and traditions. Let your natural curiosity stimulate learning. As often as you can, consult with colleagues who have had constructive experiences in various cultures. Ask them about the kinds of behaviors and communication practices they utilized which have been effective and have helped to foster mutual understanding. Always remember that, inevitably, something will get lost in the translation. It almost always does, even when you are communicating with those with whom you share a native language and culture. Remember, as the first of the overarching mindsets of the inventory states, commitment to effective intercultural communication is required.

Using International English

A simple and clear demonstration of the intention to make communication work well, cross-culturally, can be evidenced through the consistent use of International English, the language of most business exchanges. Here are some guidelines which will help you to use International English appropriately:

- When you are the speaker, clarify the message that you intend to communicate *before* you begin speaking. For people who tend to think out loud, extroverts, this could be a growing edge. Yet, the price of some internal discomfort is worth the reward of a clear, succinct message that the receiver understands.
- When conversing with those with whom you do not share a first language, speak more slowly, at the rate of fewer than 100 words per minute (Adler 2001).
- Speak in a straightforward manner, using everyday language. Eliminate slang, colloquial and culturally specific expressions, as well as imagery and metaphors. Imagery and metaphors may not translate well. Some people, as they translate from one language to another, translate word for word. Images and metaphors frequently defy literal interpretation.
- Use a simple, straightforward sentence structure. Each sentence should contain only one idea or concept.
- Use language that conveys sequence when organizing content or communicating procedures. Use phrasing like, "First… then…," or "Step one is…the second step is… next, you…lastly…" This is a practical approach for separating ideas and ordering longer descriptions.
- Direct questions, such as "Did you…?", are more effective than tag questions. A tag question is a question within a question. For example, "You did attend the meeting, did you not?" Tag questions add unnecessary complexity to the communication.
- Whole words, such as *cannot*, *would not*, *should not*, should be used instead of their contractions or reductions (*can't*, *gonna*).
- When writing, ask another person to read over your document, giving it their full attention. Solicit feedback on clarity of expression and completeness of content. Usually, someone from the host country, who has excellent skills in International English, will prove to be a valuable resource.
- Provide an extra measure of descriptive detail to insure that colleagues understand the nuances of points, offering examples to make the point and demonstrate the subtle aspects.
- Always summarize and clarify before transitioning from one point to the next or from segment to segment.
- Practice Inquiry and Advocacy, as described later in this chapter.

As an additional resource, readers may want to examine Adler's framing of "What do I do if they do not speak my language?" (2001). It contains a number of excellent ideas to consider.

Listening Actively

Listening is a valued communication skill. Some tips for listening actively include:

- Listen to understand. Adopt the other's perspective, suspending judgment and attachment to your own frame of reference.
- Allow the speaker to finish, permitting an uninterrupted sequence of thoughts.

- Model asking for clarification when confused or uncertain of the speaker's meaning. If you notice others looking or sounding confused, ask a clarifying question or make a clarifying statement to further understanding.
- Practice active listening, demonstrating engagement through nonverbal behavior. Summarize the speaker's message, accounting for the verbal and nonverbal components. The goal is to reflect full comprehension of the speaker's meaning, not simply the words that have been spoken (Adler 2001).
- Encourage active listening from others. On occasion, ask a question that allows listeners to demonstrate their understanding of the message communicated. Use a lead question like, "Would one of you summarize your understanding of the point we have been discussing? I want to be sure that we have a common understanding before moving on to the next subject."
- When witnessing a communication exchange, notice cues, verbal and nonverbal. If a lack of understanding seems evident, support the sender and receiver by acknowledging your perception of the potential misunderstanding. Ask a question of the speaker or listener or offer an interpretation of the message, stating an intention to support both in furthering clarity and understanding.
- Learn to listen deeply and discern the highest intention of the other. Look and listen beyond the words (Rogers and Farson 1979). Connect with the heart and spirit of the speaker.

Are you a good listener? What is your evidence? Under what circumstances is listening most challenging for you? What can you do to overcome this challenge? What can you do to listen even more deeply—to connect with the heart and spirit of the speaker?

Choosing Culturally Appropriate Nonverbal Behavior

Mehrabian (1971), in his study of nonverbal behavior, found that tone carries more meaning than words. Specifically, his findings indicate that when communicating in the same language, only seven percent (7%) of the message is conveyed through the spoken word. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of meaning is suggested through vocal tone and fifty-five percent (55%) is implied through other aspects of body language. With over ninety percent (90%) of a spoken message being defined by tone and body language, the nonverbal components are undeniably of critical importance.

Individuals differ in the size and sweep of hand gestures; in the frequency and intensity of their smile; in the vocal range they are comfortable utilizing; in their eye contact; and the amount of physical distance they prefer. The differences in nonverbal expression can be even more evident across cultures, particularly as you compare and contrast nonverbal expression across high- and low-context cultures. What is considered an appropriate gesture in one culture may be inappropriate, offensive, or viewed as unusual behavior in another.

For example, in my experience, touching beyond a handshake is thought to be inappropriate and an aggressive invasion of boundaries in Japan, China, and Korea.

Yet in Arabic countries, kissing on the cheek is expected. In the USA, across genders, handshakes, even hugs, can be exchanged among business associates. Consistently, I have noticed that Arab men sit closer to one another than do men from the West.

Perhaps the single nonverbal expression that seems to have universal meaning is a smile. Smiling is the same in every language, or is it? *What has your experience been with the universal message in a smile? Where and when might a smile mask emotions? Which gender is more likely to hide surprise or fear? Which gender is more likely to mask feelings of anger or disappointment? What have you determined to be the best strategy for nonverbal communication across cultures?*

Using the Ladder of Inference and Practicing Inquiry and Advocacy

So often when you communicate with another, mutual understanding is assumed. Action is taken based on assumptions. The Ladder of Inference (Ross in Senge 1994) reveals how you make inferences based on limited data and act based on those inferences. The mental pathway for this innate, reflexive process is shown in Fig. 7.5.

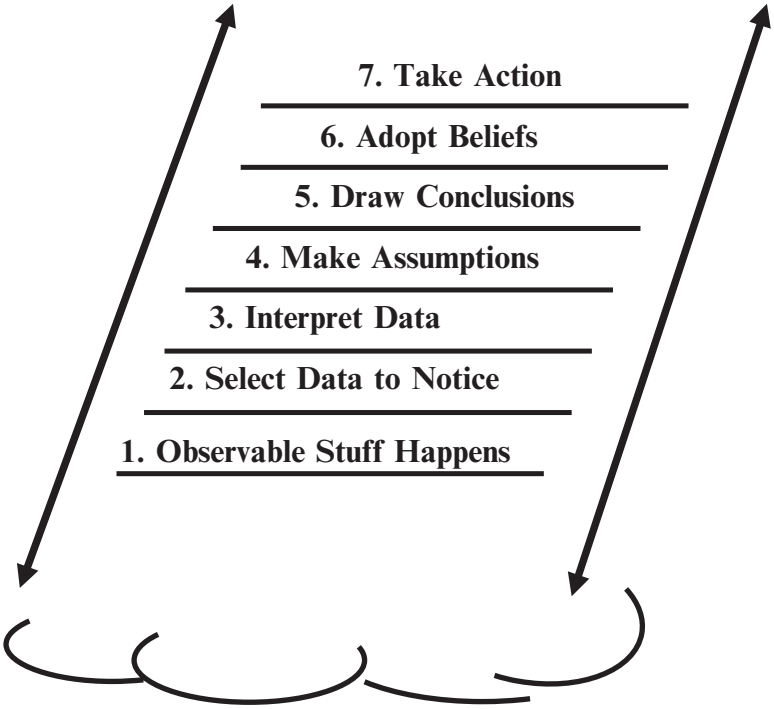


Fig. 7.5 The ladder of inference—a mental pathway (Ross in Senge 1994)

Inference is central to survival, saving you from data overload and the necessity of analyzing a myriad of inputs. Inference allows you to make decisions quickly, using limited data and a rapid sorting process. Inference can also create difficulties when you neglect to acknowledge the data with which you are working, the assumptions you have made, the conclusions you have drawn or the action you have taken. When you neglect acknowledging and testing generalizations, you limit communication to the selling of your ideas and pushing for what you want. The opportunity to discover deeper levels of truth about your own thinking, as well as the perspectives of others, is lost. Communication is short-circuited. The Ladder of Inference is a constructive tool enabling you to understand the process through which you gather data and reach conclusions. It lays out the journey along your mental pathway, from data input and selection to taking action.

Assumptions need to be revealed and probed before taking action. The skills of Advocacy and Inquiry, developed by Ross and Roberts (in Senge 1994), help to slow down the communication process, allowing assumptions to be uncovered and tested through dialogue. These skills are outlined in Table 7.3.

When you are at the point of making assumptions, drawing conclusions, adding to your beliefs about the other or taking action (Steps 4 through 7 on the Ladder), you can take the initiative to stop and share your logic with those present. The process, called *Advocacy,* invites you to communicate openly and fully. In doing so, you make your thought process transparent and implicitly invite others to do so as well. Thereby, you move your thoughts and feelings from the Hidden domain of the Johari Window into the Open area. Through conversation, you disclose your thinking. Then you can use *Inquiry*, asking others what they think, inviting dialogue, sharing your point of view, and asking about the thinking of others.

Table 7.3 contains examples of statements which can be used to reveal your thought processes and test the reality or accuracy of your assumptions. This technique models the power of self-disclosure as a communication tool, facilitating openness, self-awareness, and shared clarity. The figure also contains examples of questions you can pose to draw out and more deeply understand the thinking of

Table 7.3 Inquiry and advocacy: valuable ways of seeking information (Ross and Roberts 1994)

The ladder of inference Advocacy	Inquiry
Reveal your thought process. Invite dialogue.	Respectfully probe the thinking and reasoning of others.
My assumptions are…	What do you mean when you say…
The data I am working with…	What leads you to say…
Since…, I am concluding…	What data are you using to support your conclusions?
How do you see the situation?	How are you using the word…
What is your reaction to what I said?	Please walk me through your reasoning.
In which ways do you see it differently?	Help me understand your thinking.
If…then…	Make a process comment, e.g., "You've been quiet, what's going on?"

others. It is important to understand what the others are thinking. Finding appropriate ways to explore and gain insight into the thought processes of others is essential. The process of Inquiry can provide a direct avenue into their reasoning. Respectful probing can help to surface useful information, avoiding the pitfalls of acting based on assumptions. For example, you may have data that suggest that a team member is making assertions based on an interpretation of an individual's behavior or on specific biases related to personal philosophy or cultural conditioning. Asking questions, inquiring, gives the speaker an opportunity to hear his or her own logic and reasoning, in addition to allowing others to have a window into his or her thinking. When questioned, stepping through your logic can provide a glimpse into your own thought process, with its strengths and/or limitations. You can begin to see both logical and unfounded assumptions, or disciplined and undisciplined reasoning.

Inquiry is a powerful tool when used constructively. Misused, Inquiry can be experienced as a way of wielding power over others, shaming and embarrassing or controlling others through co-optive means. Used respectfully, however, it helps to expand openness by allowing information to flow from the Hidden dimension of the Johari Window into the Open area. Inquiry can also be a window into Blind Spots, shedding light on beliefs and thought processes that were unconscious.

Teams can use the Ladder of Inference, powered by Inquiry and Advocacy, to share and test assumptions and uncover buried truths, as team members reveal their logic and thought processes and inquire about the logic and thought processes of others.

Using Feedback—A Powerful Communication Tool

Feedback aids in increasing self-awareness and can result in enhanced competence and confidence. In a world of differences—individual, group, and cultural—feedback can help to bridge gaps. Feedback is a means to seeing yourself through the eyes of others, gaining clearer perspective on the impact of your behavior from their vantage point.

Feedback occurs directly when you are told, straight-out, that what you said or did was not clear or outright offensive or breeched a cultural norm. Sometimes, feedback is more indirect. You learn that the listener(s) did not understand the message. More often than not, you learn about your ineffectiveness when there is an unexpected response to what you said or did. Or, what occurs is different from what was desired or what you thought was agreed upon. Often, the cues indicating a lack of understanding are expressed and yet go unattended.

Feedback completes the communication loop and closes the communication gap, when one exists. It helps you to know when you have been heard and understood and when you have missed the mark. In its highest form, properly framed, feedback supports growth and development. Feedback, be it appreciative or developmental, is a generous gift that can influence you to continue an effective behavior or change an undesirable behavior. *Appreciative feedback* provides information on

any aspect of another's behavior which you value, find to be effective, and would like them to continue doing. *Developmental feedback* is offered in instances where a change in behavior is warranted to enhance effectiveness. The skill of giving and receiving both kinds of feedback—appreciative and developmental—are needed to improve your effectiveness as a communicator.

People from remarkably similar cultural backgrounds encounter filters and noise as they reach out to provide feedback to one another. In such instances, the filters can be the quality of the relationship between the giver and the receiver, the mood of the giver or receiver, or the organizational level or power relationship between the parties. Vocal tone, word choices, and nonverbal behavior impact the quality of the message and how it is received. Certainly, the forum in which the feedback is delivered, including its timeliness, is of critical importance and influences the listener's receptivity. Moreover, if the listener has requested the feedback, the reception of the information may be dramatically different from those cases in which the feedback is unsolicited. For most people, unsolicited feedback can engender defensiveness. This can be especially so when the feedback is developmental.

The cultural background of the person giving the feedback operates as a filter, influencing what is said and how it is said. Adding layers of complexity, the cultural background of the receiver operates as a filter as well, affecting how what has been said is heard, experienced, and subsequently acted upon. In high-context cultures, which tend to be very relational, it is considered disrespectful to challenge an authority figure. In low-context cultures, however, challenging authority is seen as a right, even a responsibility. In such cultures, the social structure tends to have, at its philosophical foundation, an egalitarian principle.

Frequently I find my German clients outwardly deferential to perceived authority. Even when asked for, feedback tends to be provided in an indirect fashion. I have to listen very carefully, both to what is said and what is not said and then blend that information with what has been noticed when the topic was previously discussed. My British clients, while polite, are more direct in providing critical feedback. The New York based clients, on the other hand, tend to address the critical, developmental feedback first. In fact, it is often challenging for them to acknowledge what has worked well. Cultural differences account for these group-level variations. Despite these distinctions, in most cultures, receiving constructive feedback is a rare and precious gift. Individual and team effectiveness, as well as relationship building (Matveev and Nelson 2004), require you to be able to give and receive feedback constructively.

How to Give Feedback Constructively

Here are some basic guidelines to utilize when giving feedback (Porter 1982):

- You must begin by insuring that your intent is to be helpful. If you are angry or have a bias against the other person, find a graceful way to refrain from giving feedback.

- If the recipient has not made a direct request for feedback, ask permission to give feedback.
- Describe the person's behavior and its impact specifically.
- Whether the feedback is appreciative or developmental, offer only one or two points.
- Focus only on behavior that can be changed. If a person is physically challenged and walks with a limp, it is unconstructive to provide feedback about the limp. Or, if a person takes time to carefully phrase his thoughts because English is not his first language, it is not helpful to ask him to speak faster, without pausing.
- Provide feedback close to the occurrence of the behavior about which you are speaking.
- Frame the message in a way that is nonjudgmental. Describing behavior will facilitate such an outcome. For example, instead of saying, "You are lazy about your work," which is judgmental, you could say, "I have noticed that over the last 2 weeks, you have missed the deadline on two of your major tasks and you seem to be significantly behind schedule on the third. The missed deadlines are impacting the team's ability to complete the project on schedule."
- Use language, vocal tone, and nonverbal behavior that are respectful and support clear communication. Make sure the nonverbal behavior is congruent with the content of the message. When expressing disappointment in a behavior and outcome, smiling is not appropriate. On the other hand, when expressing appreciation about behavior that has led to positive outcomes, smile and offer encouraging nonverbal cues.

How to Receive Feedback

Ask directly for the remarkable gift of feedback (Porter 1982). Select people who will be honest, providing a clear picture, from their perspective, of your behavior and its impact. Then:

- Ask behavior-specific questions to elicit behavior-specific feedback.
- Be open-minded, and breathe. Relaxed breathing will improve your ability to hear and understand the information provided.
- Listen carefully to fully comprehend the speaker's message. Whether you agree with the speaker is of no relevance. Listen and learn.
- As needed, ask questions to clarify the speaker's comments. You must make certain that questions are truly questions, intended to deepen or broaden your understanding of the message. If your questions contain a point of view, or are designed to defend your behavior, be silent and breathe.
- Respond to the speaker's comments with a nondefensive "Thank you for the feedback."
- Apart from the feedback discussion, examine the information received. If any of it is new, investigate its validity with others who will provide an honest

perspective. Be mindful of how the request for information is phrased. Ask a behavior-specific question, such as, "I would appreciate your perspective concerning the way I…What have you noticed?"

- Determine any appropriate action warranted by the feedback. In the case of appreciative feedback, will you continue the behavior? If the feedback is developmental, what adjustments will you make, if any? You always have the choice of acting on feedback or, with gratitude toward the giver, letting it go.
- When feedback is initiated by another, you may decide to listen or choose not to listen to what the other has to say.

How to Ask for Coaching on Giving and Receiving Feedback Interculturally

Ask a knowledgeable source, someone who is competent at communicating in the specific cultural context of concern, about the most appropriate way to engage in giving and receiving feedback. For example, when asking for feedback in Asia, I was encouraged to provide a series of questions framed in future-oriented terms. Questions were suggested such as, "If we were to discuss this topic again, how might we approach it to insure an even more effective outcome?" Framing the question in this way acknowledges that the feedback will aide in preparing for future discussions. With this quality of distance from potential insult or challenge to authority, the door to feedback was opened.

When you work interculturally, mistakes can occur as a result of cultural blindness. When such mistakes happen, the best you can do is learn from them. Giving feedback on a business issue or a cultural faux pas is often difficult to do. This is particularly so when the recipient of the feedback is not well known to you or there is a notable difference between job levels or the person seems to be especially sensitive to feedback. Additionally, you can feel arrogant or inappropriate saying what of another's culture-specific behavior needs to be corrected. The clearest way to decide when to provide feedback in this area is when the person's behavior could result in physical danger, breaks the law, is in violation of company policy, or measurably negates the individual's or the team's effectiveness.

For example, at times it is appropriate to provide feedback on behavior patterns that affect how others view the individual in question. It may be necessary to give an employee or colleague feedback on body odor if the problem is causing colleagues to avoid being in his or her presence. In such cases, the person may lose out on some aspects of team camaraderie, during which information is shared and team spirit is enhanced.

Hence, providing feedback is an important responsibility. As is always the case with feedback, the recipient can choose to act on the feedback or not. It is fair and appropriate for the person to have the information and equally as fair and appropriate for the individual to determine their response to the feedback. Constructive

feedback is a contribution to the individual. Always, you must remember that the recipient of information has freedom of choice about how to respond.

How to Give and Receive Team Feedback

Teams can engage in giving and receiving feedback as a group. The process can be accomplished utilizing the guidelines cited above for giving and receiving feedback. For each team member, in turn, the feedback can be focused on a specific, finite question or set of questions. Also, team members can each design their own behavior-specific questions, to ask the group. These kinds of activities, when managed constructively, enhance openness and trust, deepening relationships and potentially increasing team effectiveness. Feedback addresses and shrinks the Blind Spot described in the Johari Window. For individuals and teams, surveys can also be an effective means of collecting feedback. Be they custom designed or purchased off the shelf, they can provide a wealth of information about effectiveness and opportunities for improved functioning. Links to several organizations that design and market such tools are provided at the end of this chapter.

Relevant Competencies

Enhancing Competence as an Intercultural Communicator: An Inventory of Mindsets and Behaviors

Using the inventory, place an "S" in the boxes which represent your strengths and a "D" in the boxes which offer you the greatest opportunity for development. Ask for feedback on both areas from your colleagues.

Practicing overarching mindsets	☐ Be committed to communicating effectively ☐ Demonstrate patience with yourself and others ☐ Openly acknowledge cultural differences which may impact understanding ☐ Explicitly clarify core values and use as touchstone ☐ Be a learner with curiosity
Speaking using international English	☐ Clarify your message before speaking ☐ Speak slowly ☐ Use common, everyday words ☐ Share one idea per sentence ☐ Use words that convey sequence to separate and order your ideas ☐ Ask direct questions ☐ Use whole words ☐ Solicit feedback on the clarity of documents before distribution ☐ Offer specific examples to clarify subtleties ☐ Summarize before transitioning or closing

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	☐ Practice Inquiry and Advocacy
Listening and witnessing	☐ Actively listen to understand ☐ Allow the speaker to finish the thought ☐ Facilitate clarity by practicing Inquiry ☐ Discern highest intention of the speaker
Inquiring and advocating	☐ Reveal and investigate mental models utilizing skills of Inquiry and Advocacy ☐ Inquiry—ask one question of speaker to uncover and reveal logic and reason ☐ Advocacy—openly and fully disclose your thought processes and feelings
Giving and receiving feedback	*Giving feedback* ☐ Test your intent ☐ Ask permission to speak ☐ Describe behavior and its impact ☐ Offer only one or two points ☐ Focus on changeable behavior ☐ Make it timely ☐ Choose nonjudgmental language ☐ Use supportive, respectful nonverbal behavior *Receiving feedback* ☐ Ask specific questions ☐ Listen with openness and a desire to understand the message ☐ Ask only clarifying questions ☐ Respond without defending your behavior ☐ Offer appreciation for the information ☐ Consider the information and any warranted action *Ask for coaching on giving and receiving feedback cross-culturally*
Choosing nonverbal behavior	☐ Choose behavior to support the message ☐ Use visual aids ☐ Engage in culturally appropriate nonverbal behavior

Summary

Communication is the primary vehicle for influencing others, getting things done, breaking down barriers, getting to know strangers, and deepening your knowledge of those who are familiar to you. Communication, the tool used to share your reality and explore the reality of others, is successful when the sender's message is received and understood as intended. To achieve that end, individuals and teams must master the ability to convey a message, facilitate buy-in to ideas and initiatives, and bridge individual and cultural differences within the team and across the organization. Through the consistent application of flexibility in approach, open-mindedness, self-awareness, and the willingness to honor the communication needs of different cultural groups, based on their values and the priority they place on them, teams can develop effective intercultural communication.

While respectful acknowledgment of differences is a challenge when communicating face-to-face, it becomes even more difficult when working virtually, lacking many communication cues. In such instances, multiple communication tools and techniques prove helpful, ranging from the use of written agendas, to the distribution of talking points, to the use of summary statements. Whether communicating virtu-

ally or actually, techniques such as International English, the Ladder of Inference, Inquiry and Advocacy, Active Listening, and Giving and Receiving Feedback are of critical importance as teams seek ways to communicate effectively.

As the world becomes more diverse and boundaries shrink, communication becomes more dynamic and challenging. Yet, it is the only way that human beings have of exchanging information. By necessity, communication must be mastered if you are to diminish confusion, anger, resentment, and derailment of initiatives. Successful communication facilitates collaboration, inclusion, innovative solutions, and the establishment of strong relationships. Successful communication enables you to make your best contribution to the team and the organization.

Communicating with clarity conserves your most precious resources. With effective communication, a spirit of collaboration, productivity, harmony, and peace exists. Life on teams becomes easier and more fulfilling.

More happens in communication than the mere exchange of words. Understanding on the intellectual and emotional levels can and should occur. All progress, be it in teamwork or any level of relationship, is made through communication—what you hear and see, what you feel and sense, and ultimately, what you understand. While the measurable aspects of communication are its visible dimensions, I believe the most powerful aspects are invisible. The power and clarity of any communication is contained in the dynamic energy or feeling tone of a given exchange. Frequently, the energy of an exchange stays with you much longer than the words that were spoken. The energy or intention of the exchange has the most lasting effect because it relays the deeper message. Yet, this aspect of communication defies definition or measurement.

As the physical world and its boundaries continue to shrink, organizations are relying on teams more and more. Some teams will work face-to-face and some will be virtual. Creative and effective ways of spanning the gaps created by differences—individual and cultural—will need to be discovered. Consistently, you will have to rely on learning how to know what others want, need, and are intending to convey. A more effective system for knowing will be needed.

When working on a team, explicitly define the communication norms and traditions by which the team will operate. Make sure that they represent the needs and preferences of all and will serve the team well, as it establishes open communication and builds trusting relationships, enabling it to accomplish its task. Publicly acknowledge differences and their potential to generate creativity, as well as miscommunication. Solicit the help of all concerned to join in making the communication process work. Practice Inquiry and Advocacy. As a communication practice, document meeting highlights, action items, and key decisions. Distribute the notes as a support, with the suggestion that the recipients respond to the document, including raising questions for clarification.

I believe that, at the transpersonal level, everything is already known and understood. You *can* see into the hearts and minds of colleagues and neighbors. Knowing at this level requires a still mind, relinquishment of the ego, and investment in knowing with more than what the conscious mind is aware of. You will need to allow the witness within to be the knower, the part that is connected to everyone else and to the Universal Mind.

A challenge is to bring this high quality, a more-accurate-than-words kind of knowing and communicating, into conscious awareness. Communication and understanding will improve when life is lived in responsible relationship to *the whole* and to individual needs, neither subordinate to the other. *What do you think?*

Assessment Instruments

ITAP International www.itapintl.com

With offices in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Europe, ITAP International delivers a range of business solutions and services, all designed to "Build Human Capability—Globally." ITAP has the expertise to develop and implement customized assessments or administer a proprietary survey called "Culture in the Workplace." The results of this instrument, licensed by Dr. Geert Hofstede, provide practical, behavior-focused suggestions on ways to modify your behavior and approach to communication so that you are more likely to be understood and experienced as relevant and appropriate.

Training Management Corporation—TMC www.tmcorp.com

TMC provides learning and consulting solutions based on the book *Doing Business Internationally*. Their "Cultural Orientations Indicator" is a web-based, self-reporting instrument that assesses individual preference along ten cultural dimensions. The profile you receive will enable you to compare your individual results with you team's aggregate data, as well as with national norms from various countries of your choice. The survey is available in a number of languages, for ease of administration.

Case Study: He Threatened Me!

As you read the case study below, consider the following questions:

- *What might be some of the cross-cultural communication dynamics that played a part in this situation?*
- *Given the potential cultural differences, what kinds of nonverbal behavior might have contributed to the researcher's interpretation of the executive's message?*
- *What cues do you look for as an indication of a miscommunication?*

A large international firm was facing a major issue with their largest product. The regulator community and customer advocacy groups were challenging

the integrity of the data the company supplied to the industry's regulatory body. As the investigation grew in size and scope, many people who were involved in the testing were interviewed. During one such interview, an outside researcher said that she had been threatened by a company executive. The executive accused of making the threatening comments was a man, native to Japan. The outside researcher, a woman who was born and raised in Madras, said that this was the first time since her arrival in the United States three years prior, that she felt fearful in a work setting. She said she felt certain that her personal safety was at risk, given the treatment she received from the Japanese executive. The executive pointed out that he was simply doing his job, motivating the researcher to keep focused on producing a satisfactory and timely outcome for the business they both served, as well as the consumers who would benefit from the product.

Case Study: What Did She Say?

As you read the case study below, consider the following questions:

- *When you are speaking with an international audience, what must you be aware of and take into account?*
- *In what ways does the behavioral example you set—what you say, how you say it and the context in which it is said—impact how comfortable or uncomfortable others feel?*
- *What would you have done to diminish the negative impact the following presentation had on the rest of the meeting?*

An international financial firm convened its Human Resources leadership team, key executives from around the world, on the coast of Spain for a retreat and strategic planning meeting. One segment of the meeting featured a skilled and highly successful speaker from the United States, who talked about change—organizational and personal change. Being less accustomed to working internationally, during her presentation she used a number of personal examples from the private parts of her life; the parts of her life that involved relationships and situations outside of the workplace. Her culturally mixed audience had mixed reactions to her comments. Many members of the audience were offended by what they viewed as inappropriate and unprofessional remarks. The speaker had crossed a boundary, bringing the very private into a public, professional context. Some of the meeting participants felt pressured, wondering if they too were expected to share at an equally personal level. They wondered if they would be judged negatively by their leadership, those who sponsored the speaker, if they too did not use examples from their private lives. The presentation had a negative effect for the remainder of the meeting.

Case Study: Changing the Cook Stove: A US Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal

As you read the case study below, consider the following questions:

- *Was feedback solicited and provided?*
- *Was this a culturally sensitive approach to feedback or an approach that reflected the Peace Corps worker's preferences?*
- *What are some alternative approaches which may have been more efficient and successful?*

As a U.S. American male Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal, West Africa, I acted as a regional coordinator for an appropriate technology project. The purpose of the project was to spread knowledge and use of homemade, fuel-efficient cook stoves, in order to reduce the pressures on rapidly dwindling forest resources partly caused by the use of firewood. In my role as coordinator of the effort in the northern part of the country, I was responsible for setting up one-week trainings in interested villages, preparing the participants, and loosely supervising the trainings themselves. I worked with a team of three trainers, Tapha, Thiarra, and Pape (all Senegalese men), who lived in the villages during the trainings. As supervisor, I would drop in for a day or two at a time to make sure everything was working as planned.

The stove was made from a mixture of clay and sand, a technology imported from Guatemala. Since this was a nontraditional material, it seemed unlikely to gain easy acceptance. It was also extraordinarily labor-intensive to produce and use, requiring extensive pounding of dry clay in preparation and much barehanded beating to get a solid, packed mass during construction.

During the latter part of my time in Senegal, I helped introduce a new stove model into the program. The new model, developed in Burkina Faso, looked quite similar in design but took advantage of more traditional building materials. A combination of clay, manure, straw, and a little water was mixed and left to sit for a week. This was similar to the process used in building adobe houses in the region. This "fermented' mixture was then used to form a stove right around and above the three rocks used in the traditional three-rock fire.

I felt strongly that the new stove was more appropriate than the old. It involved introducing only a new form, not a new material, and might therefore be more easily accepted. It took a third of the time to make, and involved modeling the materials instead of packing and pounding. The adobe mixture also allowed for a stove with thinner walls, involving less material and absorbing less of the heat from a cooking fire. Finally, it used the built-in rocks to form a stand for the cooking pot (the old stove had no stand), and the door to the firebox was reinforced with scrap metal from tin cans. It was therefore less likely to cave in. There seemed enough distinct advantages to warrant trying it out, and I was excited at the prospect of contributing to a useful innovation.

I first trained the trainers in the new technology, since I was the only person in the organization who had learned how to use it. This put me in the position of acting as both the technical authority and supervisor of the training team. We then began a pilot effort to use the new model in training people in villages, to see how it would work in practice. For the first few days, I stayed with the team and participated in the training. When it seemed as though things were well under way, I returned to my previous pattern of occasional visits.

The team of trainers proved quite successful in adapting to the new materials. However, problems arose in two areas: wall thickness and building technique. I saw quickly that all three trainers had a great predilection for making the stove walls as thick as ever (twice what they should have been). This used more materials to build a less efficient (more heat-absorbent) stove. They also seemed stuck in their habits of pounding and beating the new, more elastic materials, instead of modeling and shaping them. Rather than making it solid, the beating simply made the new stove lose its shape. It worried me to see my pet project losing some of its ease and efficiency unnecessarily.

I tried a number of tactics to change these habits. At first, I simply explained why thin walls and modeling made a better stove and made it easier. I announced that this was how this stove should be made. This tactic had very little apparent success; fat walls and pounding continued, much to my chagrin.

Rather than forcing the issue, I chose a gentler approach. I made it a point to visit more frequently than usual and at each visit I praised the work they were doing. I also threw in a little pitch for thin walls and modeling. I particularly praised thinner-walled stoves; I urged and encouraged the trainers to change their old ways. I held back from making a big fuss about it, but I brought it up gently whenever the occasion arose, and often with individual trainers instead of the whole group. I was mildly frustrated by the situation, but my appreciation of the team's generally excellent work helped me to relax and have patience.

As a result, the stove walls eventually thinned down (though not quite as much as I might have liked), and the trainers gradually accepted the smooth handling that the mixture demanded. In the other areas of the new stove model, the team had been extremely adaptable and resourceful, picking up the new system quickly and adding a few very useful innovations of their own. Overall, I felt very satisfied with what we had achieved, and pleased that changes had happened cooperatively instead of through an exercise of authority.

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Resources

Communicating Across Cultures by Elaine Winters. Elaine Winters is a Cross-cultural educator and Instructional Designer. She is the co-author (with Rob Sellin) of: *Cultural Issues in Business Communication*. http://www.bena.com/ewinters/xculture.html
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Denison Consulting. Bringing organizational culture and leadership to the bottom line is the focus of this global leader's research-based model. Denison will also support you in custom designing assessment and feedback tools. http://www.denisonculture.com
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MeridianEaton Global. GlobeSmart, Meridian's leading edge, web-based tool provides detailed knowledge on how to conduct business with people from around the world. http://www.meridianeaton.com

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Sietar Europe. SIETAR offers an array of cross-cultural assessment instruments. http://www.sietar-europa.org