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Melanie Moll

# The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication

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# The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication

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ISBN 978-3-642-28237-9 ISBN 978-3-642-28238-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6
Springer Heidelberg Dordrecht London New York



Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

# Contents

# Introduction

# 1

## 1.1 An Open Conversation

If you think that intercultural business communication is free from human reaction and emotion, think again. A great fallacy that we often carry with us is the notion that business communication deals only with facts, and therefore is somehow more rational or less subjective than ordinary intercultural communication. All communication is tied, in one way or another, to human factors; as we shall see throughout this book, our humanity is the essence of communication. Business communication is no exception. The added complexity of intercultural variables simply increases the chances of misunderstanding or misinterpretation in our business communications.

Doesn't business communication mostly deal in facts? Perhaps, but the point here is that it still involves **interpersonal communication**, which we shall see, is not immune to reactionism. But, you argue, you are a rational person, and you never or rarely allow emotions to play a part in your business communication. Let's be open about this—suppose you are in a negotiation and your counterpart is constantly interrupting you. Would this bother you? Would you consider his or her behavior rude and inappropriate? What about when you present what you feel is a complete proposal and your counterpart politely but firmly sets it aside, refusing to look at it? Or how about when you are in the middle of a discussion and your counterpart suddenly stands up and walks out for a break? Perhaps you have experiences where you thought that your proposed deal couldn't be refused—you offered the best services for the most competitive prices, and yet your deal was turned down. What happened? How can a fool-proof deal not be accepted? Do any of these situations cause a reaction in you? For most of us, they would. Interestingly, we will show here that such situations are often a direct result of intercultural differences.

Contrary to general opinion, it is not the case that business communication deals only with facts and rational decisions. At the heart of all interpersonal communication lies a fundamental understanding of human behavior. Cultural factors, combined with the complexity of human interaction, can and will present interesting and at times surprising challenges for us as we navigate our way through life. When dealing with business communication, researchers have been guilty of isolating it from

M. Moll, *The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication,*
Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_1,

the human factor by focusing on purely business issues and strategies. What we will do here is combine critical aspects of intercultural communication theory with real examples and anecdotes that remind us how business interactions are subject to the same human reactions and emotions as any other interaction. Importantly, what might seem rational to you could be interpreted very differently in another cultural context.

The point for us is success. How can we achieve successful intercultural business communication, even when dealing in such a complex area? Many books on intercultural business communication include lists of do's and don'ts and how to act within other cultural contexts. This book is different: we focus here on the tremendous impact that deeply embedded cultural norms and expectations have on the very form and structure of our communication itself. The detailed attention to language usage in this book should help you to understand and recognize how people act out their own cultural expectations and selves. Furthermore, we will see that non-verbal communication can likewise be examined using the same theoretical constructs to identify cultural influences. Looking at communication this way we will show you how to improve your own intercultural interactions, and thereby achieve higher levels of business communication success.

What we will not do is provide you with a list of rules or even what some have called 'the ten commandments of intercultural communication', but instead we will **increase your own awareness of the multiple factors that we as cultural actors bring into our interactions with one another**. There are several reasons for this. First of all, we believe that any intercultural communication, business or otherwise, is subject to cultural misunderstanding and misinterpretation. It simply is not enough to be able to speak the target language fluently. Also, after reading this book, you will see that having a good business strategy, plan, or idea is not enough to ensure your success when dealing interculturally.

Second, since all communication is as dynamic as the context in which it takes place, suggesting one set of ready-made solutions becomes irrelevant. No two situations will be exactly alike; being able to adapt to the situation in which you find yourself is crucial. Knowing how cultures tend to work, therefore, gives you a strong advantage when entering new contexts. Concepts that we tend to see as absolute are often not so fixed in another's cultural view.

We have designed this book to help you as the intercultural business communicator to function efficiently and competently within your own international context. Within the Quintessential series, we are going to provide you with important theoretical frameworks with which you can understand the cultural impact on business communication. Specifically, we will include detailed examples that will take you past the theory and into the practical world. Our short and accessible format will offer you a chance to develop a strong understanding of both culture and communication, and to apply these into your own business interactions—without having to read dozens of self-help or academic textbooks!

Our keyword in this book is **awareness**. In other words, it is our belief that the essence of any intercultural communication is to develop a strong awareness of, and ability to function with, cultural variables that can ultimately determine the success or failure of your intercultural business encounters. We want to show you how

**cultural norms and expectations are able to be communicated and recognized in so many ways through both our verbal and non-verbal communication behavior**. In so doing, we hope that you will internalize and individualize your own skills based on your understanding of what is happening in the cultural encounter and be able to react accordingly.

## 1.2 Setting Our Definitions

### 1.2.1 Defining Culture

Our first task is to define culture as we shall deal with it in a book about business communication. All human civilizations shape, and are shaped by, culture. We hear the word culture every day. In fact, the word culture can mean different things in different contexts, so this makes defining it a little trickier. For some, the term culture refers to those customary or social traditions, rituals, or behaviors practiced by various ethnic groups around the world. This definition of culture mainly focuses on obvious tribal or ethnic behaviors, often celebrating the diverse and colorful practices shared by a group of people. When we refer to individual national cultures, are we talking about distinctive individual works and institutions, or general ways of doing things, or types of food, religious rituals, sporting events, etc.? Some reference dictionaries characterize culture as a particular form or stage of civilization, usually based on common regional boundaries. When defining the culture of business communication, we do have to include geography at times, since economic practices are in part a direct reflection of regional powers.

To complicate things further, within a general regional culture we find constant examples of **sub-cultures**. For example, German business culture is widely known for its precision and punctuality, but a sub-culture of Germany is located in Bavaria, with characteristic jovial nature and good-hearted hospitality. In this region, precision and punctuality are still valued, but at times can take on a lower priority than other variables. One example of this is the Oktoberfest—during this time, what normally might be a strict schedule can be relaxed, and many individual Bavarians, visitors, and even entire companies flock to the tents for loads of light-hearted fun and drinks. If you have done business in Bavaria during this time, you know that schedules can change, and especially early-morning routines can be disrupted because of the night before!

But there is more. Since shared practices and beliefs can define culture, then we find cultures and sub-cultures within various political groups, religious groups and sects, and even academic populations. The homosexual community can be defined as a culture (with various sub-cultures), a group of radical extremists have their own culture, and competitors at a technology conference share a culture. We can talk about teenage culture, generation Y culture, internet culture, film culture, or even fashion culture. Because of the enormous influence of globalization and trade, we see daily examples of non-regional cultural contexts with regard to the business arena. This makes it especially difficult to characterize what culture is—unless we

keep its highly dynamic quality in mind. In fact, one characteristic of culture is that it **can** have geopolitical and regional boundaries, but it **must** be located within groups of people. What this means is that **culture is not simply limited by physical or regional boundaries**.

What such examples have in common is that they **share some know-how of how to accomplish a given activity, behavior, or task**. Here is where we find our own present focus on business culture. Within your own working context, there are specific expectations and norms that you operate with every day. In this sense, we can talk of doing culture, which implies **actions and specific responsibility** on our part. So culture then takes on the addition of not simply being a characteristic, but also something we do, or act out, as well as something we essentially are. It can be discursive; this implies that **our culture defines us but we also define our culture**.

Importantly, here we are concerned with practically applying the notion of culture to our everyday business lives. Therefore we will approach culture from a practical standpoint:

- Culture is the meaningful way in which people act and interact in their social contexts with one another.

This definition we will take to include all human interactional behavior which can incorporate small as well as larger groups, regional and political boundaries, and is not limited in terms of regional scope and sequence. Our social context, in this definition, is therefore the type of business interaction that you, as a business manager, encounter every day. The definition embraces the norms, values, and practices of all kinds of people and their related groups. Importantly, it also includes the practices generated from the result of contact between groups, a point which we will develop later. As we will see in Chap. 2, part of our difficulty in defining culture really stems from the enormous impact of globalization.

With a workable definition of culture in hand, we can turn our attention to the concept of communication. What does it mean to communicate, and in what ways is communication such an integral part of human behavior? Is business communication different from other forms of interaction, and if so, how?

### 1.2.2 Defining Communication

Let's look at the general first. Basic definitions of communication will include some form of the following: **a source, a message, and a recipient**. Critically, communication always involves at least two entities. These two entities can be individuals, but they don't have to be. Countries, organizations, political parties, etc. can communicate with one another and with others. In business communication, of course, we find the same principles.

Communication can occur on the **macro**, general public level, but also on the **micro**, person-to-person level. For example, election practices in Zimbabwe communicate to the citizens of that country but also to the world specific messages

regarding the government's position on power holding. This is an example of macro communication. A takeover negotiation between two companies would fit the idea of a macro communication in business. On the other hand, a price negotiation between a sales and a purchasing agent might be an example of micro communication.

Communication can be **deliberate or non-deliberate**. When a company lays off employees but does not cut the management salaries, that company has just communicated its value of the general worker to its employees. Perhaps unavoidable, this layoff nevertheless is a deliberate message to the company's staff.

The means and speed of communication have increased dramatically in the last two decades. Fast developing technology has seen the rise of cyber communication channels, including emails, internet sites, instant messages, texting, and more. In many ways, just like culture, all sorts of communication are shaped by but also shape globalization.

For our purposes here, we will leave the definition of general communication open enough to cover a rather wide range of variables. We will take communication to mean the following:

- Communication is the sharing of any message through any means by one entity to another.

This definition is intended to cover whether a message is intentional or not, whether it is delivered by a single or multiple source, and its ability to be delivered through virtually any venue. As you probably already know, both culture and communication are **dynamic** constructs which continually undergo variation and whose definitions are constantly being refined.

When analyzing business communication, we can use the above definition but adapt it just slightly:

- Business communication is sharing messages in an attempt to target improvement and fulfillment of the mission or objectives of the business organization.

As you know, communication is not limited to verbal interaction. As a matter of fact, nonverbal interaction (such as various forms of body language) also serves to communicate meaning. Corporate decisions, projections of self or organizations, advertising or marketing practices, styles of negotiation, and even fashion trends can qualify as means of cultural communication. We will come back to this issue in detail in Chap. 5.

## 1.3 Models of Culture

Often, a visual representation of cultural communication helps to develop our understanding of how this process works. There are, of course, many ways to picture cultural communication. For example, some researchers like to refer to the 'iceberg


**Fig. 1.1** The Iceberg Model of Culture. (Adapted from Hall 1977)

model' of culture. In this representation, only a limited surface-level amount of information is readily available to the general public, while more individualized value orientations are often hidden beneath the general surface. What then happens is that the individual's actions and talk communicate these less visible values and expectations of values to others. You can see how this might be visualized in Fig. 1.1.

Originally described by Edward T. Hall (1977), the iceberg model displays which sorts of cultural behaviors might be visible on the surface of a culture, and which beliefs and orientations might be hidden beneath the surface. Importantly, while only a small portion of the culture might be obvious to the casual observer, Hall argues that most of the shaping aspects of a person's background can only be discovered through close and personal experience (similar to the enormous mass of an iceberg below the surface of water).

How might a model such as this one be relevant to intercultural business communication? Clearly, as we shall see, orientations to power, environment, competitiveness, and other sub-surface variables will be important in any intercultural interaction. Business interactions simply mask the presence of some of these variables by an overt attention to factual, contractual, or strategic topics. But the cultural variables are still there! It won't matter how good your presentation is if you don't recognize the power factor in your target culture. Talking to the whole group, expecting a collective decision, might turn out meaningless, and leave you confused. Using short-term pragmatism might work well in your business, but not in the same industry in another cultural context. Arriving on-time to a particular appointment might be a priority to you, but you might find that you are left waiting for over an hour in the lobby. In other words, what we expect in terms of behavior from others, even in business interactions, can at times be surprisingly at odds with what actually happens. This is precisely why it is important to heighten your awareness of how cultures tend to work generally, and what impact they have even on the most targeted business communication.

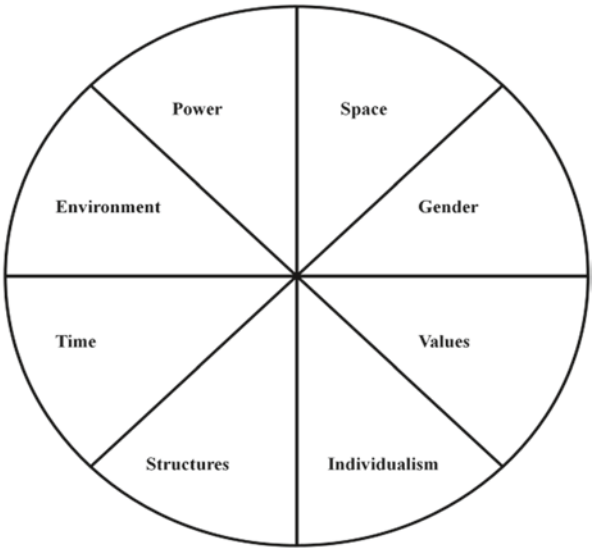



**Fig. 1.2** The cultural orientations wheel model. (Adapted from Brace, Walker and Walker 1995)

There are other ways to visualize cultural communication. One common approach is to represent different facets of culture as different spokes of a wheel, with each radiating outwards to complete the whole object. So for example, Brake, Walker and Walker (1995) have identified important variables that we could use to help us distinguish different cultural practices based on different orientations. The orientations become obvious through how each is communicated in various ways to others. Figure 1.2 illustrates the wheel model.

What is important about both of the above orientations models is their attempt to communicate the **enormity of cultural differences**. Underneath a rather small visible section of the iceberg model lurks much more cultural information that is influenced by values, attitudes, worldviews, and various approaches. For the wheel model, the facets of a culture are visible but constantly changing in terms of the role each plays in ongoing interaction. As the wheel turns, cultural variables are in continual and dynamic movement, and they build upon one another for their function. Another variation on these models include the context-based approach; the various types of contexts that a person finds themselves in will shape their behaviors and perceptions, as well as representations of themselves (for example, see Neuliep 2005).

Of course, there are other ways to portray how culture is communicated, but the point is to capture the essence of the multidimensional, layered synergies that work together to portray a person's culture. All representations of cultural communication assume both verbal and non-verbal elements. In other words, **how we portray our culture can be done in a variety of ways—whether you are interacting**

**in business or any other social context**. Specifically, our goal here is to explore some of these ways, and to help you identify them in your own future interactions.[1] This is critical, since our reactions to others' behavior will often cause a response in our own emotional states. What you might interpret as aggressive, careless, or even rude interactions might not be what the other party interprets at all, and vice versa. We think it is very important to have a good understanding of this in order to increase your own chances of successful communication.

## 1.4 Purpose of Our Approach

This book is designed to emphasize the essence of how cultural meaning is communicated in business interactions. This means that our primary focus is on the **modes or genres** of messages. What makes our approach different from others will be our detailed attention to **language use**, and the ways in which people 'package' their messages differently. Of course, we will examine non-verbal behaviors and practices that help us understand how people act out their cultural selves, but before we do this, we think it is important to understand the various layers of talk and how people use language to portray their norms and expectations. Again, our belief is that the essence of all successful intercultural competence lies in being aware of how people portray their culture through their interactions with one another. Although on the surface level this might seem obvious, you will be surprised at how much information we can gain by taking apart such interactions in detail.

The main reason we will spend so much time on detailed, intricate analyses of interaction is to be able to show you how much meaning can occur in simply a few seconds! In other words, creating and building an **awareness** of how cultural interaction works to portray messages is a primary goal here. In this way, we hope that you will learn to recognize cultural expectations in your own interactions, and be better able to make sense of why people around you are behaving as they are.

## 1.5 Difficulties in Understanding Culture

Any discussion of culture, however fascinating it might be, is not without some problems. Of course one issue is in the defining of culture, as we have seen. In embracing one aspect of culture, another could be ignored. Focusing on religious traditions, for example, can obscure the political practices that may govern and attempt to regulate such traditions. This means that the point of focus might mask or hide, to

[1] One danger in defining culture is that we run the risk of creating and furthering stereotypes. To the extent that we can identify and analyze **trends in human interactional behavior**, we will make some generalizations. But this does not imply that we understand all members of a culture to act this way or that way, or to hold the same beliefs.

some extent, the realities occurring under the surface of the issue in question. This issue we will discuss in some detail in the coming chapters, especially in Chap. 2.

Further, although it is probably impossible to account for every single detail of a dynamic, discursive, meaningful analysis of culture, the important point is to be aware that **no person or social entity ever operates in isolation, but rather in sync with a host of other incoming variables or influences**. Practically speaking, this means that when we talk about such notions as time and what time means for different groups, we must not forget that time operates in conjunction with speed, context, and in some cases, spatial requirements.

A third problem we face when analyzing intercultural interaction is that **not everyone agrees on what constitutes a cultural variable as opposed to personality or character traits**. Related to this problem is the fact that cultures are not completely homogeneous, which means that not everyone in a given culture practices the same behavior consistently! The point is this: just as there is no universally accepted definition of culture, so there are also no perfect boundaries for localizing social action, or separating social acts as a symbol of group membership from individual acts. As a general rule, however, we will focus on the larger social practices, rather than on individuality and all its complexity.

Of course another challenge is the fact that whenever we make claims about a culture, we will no doubt find **exceptions** to those claims! Any cultural characterization brings with it the high probability of exceptions; in fact, sometimes the exceptions are what help identify the norm. Sociolinguists often characterize Germans, for example, as being highly direct in their conversational styles. It would be wrong, however, to state that all Germans are direct, since obviously other discourse styles exist and some Germans prefer non-confrontational approaches. A well-documented business example (Vozelgang et al. 1999) describes upper management as using more indirect conversational styles, quite possibly because they no longer feel the need to compete in a direct, confrontational way with their colleagues.

In this book we will no doubt come across exceptions to every "rule" of culture we find. For the most part, here we will have to accept that any cultural characterization is by definition not exhaustive.

What is key, however, is to understand that our purpose is to heighten your awareness of trends and tendencies in cultural variation, so that you have some practical tools at your disposal for your own business interactions.

## 1.6 Dynamics of Intercultural Communication

Just as quickly as current events shape and are shaped by our societies, so we too must adapt our understanding of how cultures are developing. In 1967, Martin McLuhan famously described a world in which technology would connect even the most remote areas of the planet. He called this phenomenon the **global village**. Today, we can definitely see how we are united to other people via our technology. This of course leads to more intercultural contact and exchange. In fact, it has


**Fig. 1.3** A connected world is the trademark of globalization. (Moll 2010)

also given rise to more modern forms of communication, such as email, discussion boards, texting, twittering, etc. You can communicate individually with people you have never met face-to-face. Social researchers note that the internet itself has provided an enormous venue for increased interpersonal communication, regardless of geographic and political borders (Martin and Nakayama 2007).

There are several consequences to such dynamics in communication. First, more contact and exchanges means we are able to receive more information about cultures that were previously less known or discussed. Also, it is possible to observe various common global patterns which make up what we will call the **metaculture**. Because of increased contact due to globalization, we can identify a supra-level of mutual global behaviors across cultures. Most of our world shares at least one **lingua franca**, or a shared code of meaning—at the moment this is English. However, we also share certain symbols, behaviors, and practices. For example, consider the enormous social networking effects of Facebook (Fig. 1.3). Using a medium such as Facebook allows us to talk to one another in real-time, create groups, organize social causes, market products. Such elements as Facebook are crucial contributors to increased intercultural communication, and to the resulting increase of shared practices and norms. We will examine how globalization has shaped, and in turn is being shaped by, this surface level we call metaculture.

## 1.7 Chapter Contents

As we begin, we will explore the notion of globalization, the effects of globalization on cultures, and its relevance to us. Chapter 2 will examine what we have termed the **metaculture**, a real level of shared global practice which is visible across most cultures. As mentioned above, just as many cultures share some code for speaking (lingua franca), so they also share certain behaviors and practices. These practices (whether business or non-business) have been spread through the process of globalization, and in turn help to spread globalization. In many ways we have become so accustomed to such a superlevel of culture that we scarcely recognize it. For example, whether one turns on the news in Hong Kong or Berlin, we expect to see a similar format for news reporting. As a matter of fact, the mere turning on of the television itself in most cultures proves that we share some norms. Music, movies, internet usage, etc. are only a few of the categories where we see a metacultural level operating. One area where the metaculture is most evident is in business practice. This makes intercultural business communication especially susceptible to misunderstandings, because we often expect what we are accustomed to. Chapter 2 delves into this phenomenon, tracing the spread and scope of metacultural practice globally. We will also examine the dangers of assuming that a practice is identical to ours based on the metaculture, and how to avoid such assumptions.

Chapter 3 will shift our focus from simply talking about cultural behavior to actually analyzing real examples of communication. **Although globalization may have spread a layer of shared practices throughout, there nevertheless remains a much more complex and intricate picture of cultural norms underneath this metacultural layer**. Also in Chap. 3 we examine some specific trends and tendencies that enable us to understand intercultural issues. Our goal is not to stereotype, but we do want to present you with predictable practices that still find their full expression based on both the context and the participants. These practices we will call **cultural patterns**, and we will focus on major cultural norms and variables that show up in most interactions—business or otherwise. How cultures see time, space, ethics, religion, gender issues, and language styles, for example, are types of cultural patterns. Many social scientists have adopted the terms **high** and **low contexts** in categorizing cultural patterns, and we will use this theoretical distinction in our analyses as well.

Chapter 4 will take the theoretical tools we describe and use them to practically take apart the details of intercultural business interaction. Here we pinpoint specifically **language use** and how it affects our daily, ongoing interactions.[2] Most books on intercultural communication mention language as a sideline variable, and note how profitable it is to learn at least one other important world language. By way of contrast, how we say what we say is of central importance in this book, as you shall see.

[2] While our focus in this book is business communication, we recognize that all communication is important in building successful relationships, and therefore we will provide both formal and casual interaction examples.

- We suggest that how we use our language plays the largest individual role in any human interactional behavior, and thus awareness of such usage is critical for understanding the quintessence of intercultural business communication.

The way people make sense of their lives, negotiate important moments or events, and compartmentalize all sorts of meaning into their experiences is, to a large degree, achieved with and through language. Central to understanding how language and culture work together is the notion of **communicative competence**. The communicative competence is the level or ability at which one figures out not just the literal meaning of a sentence or phrase, but also the pragmatic meaning or meanings attached to it. Whether a person is communicatively competent or not is often rather easy to see. Here we are not talking about a specific language or dialect, but rather the way people from that language group use their language to interact with one another. This distinction will become clearer in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5 as we discuss specific examples and real interactions.

Since not all communication is verbal, we will also give consideration to various non-verbal ways that business communities portray meaning. In Chap. 5 we look at some of the major modes of displaying cultural expectations, and how these relate so intricately to any analysis of culture—for example, how people deal with power, values, and hierarchies in different cultures.

Globalization, which we discussed above, will remain a central focus of the entire text. To some extent, we might say that intercultural issues have become so much more important because of globalization. At the same time, these issues themselves have seen change and reshaping. This paradox was well articulated by Denis de Rougemont:

> Culture requests a paradoxical pact: diversity must be the principle of unity, taking stock of differences is necessary not to divide, but to enrich culture even more.

Many cultural patterns might seem threatened through the spread and intensification of globalization. Is there one best way of doing things? Can globalized companies impose their norms on others, and what might be the success or failure of such processes? What about best practices—aren't there globally recognized ways of doing business that everyone follows? In this book our approach will be descriptive; that is, we are not going to push you to take one approach over another, but rather simply present the differences and then let you make up your mind about how to respond. What you choose to do with the information presented here will help determine your future level of successful intercultural interactions.

## 1.8 Goals for This Book

The main purpose of this book is to provide you with **practical tools** that will help you make sense of your own intercultural interactions. That is, we want you to be able to see and understand human behavior and recognize that some actions

are simply not going to match your own expectations, even within your business context. When this happens, most likely you are facing a situation that is culturally-driven, and you will have to be able to recover relevant meaning from the action. For example, it is not enough to be proficient in the target language. You also need to know how to **use** the language appropriately for that context in order to achieve communicative competence. After reading this book, you will have a better understanding of some of the more obvious cultural patterns, issues, and problems through the lenses of language, power, and various negotiation strategies influenced by globalization.

A related goal is to give you sufficient **practice** in a practical format. You should be able to pull your own experiences into these situations, and relate them to your understanding of culture—why did the last negotiation not go as well as you had hoped? Why is doing business with certain culture types so irritating to you? Or why does there seem to be an invisible barrier between you and the other organization members in the target culture? We will examine this through the use of examples, dialogues and clips of interaction. The relationship between the theory and the practice should thus tighten considerably, and provide you with maximum benefits.

Finally, our goal is to encourage you to be able to look beyond yourself and your surroundings, to appreciate the dynamic, organized, infinitely complex nature of human interaction. Variety can be beautiful. People are shaped through their individual and collective national cultures, their history, economic and religious backgrounds, and cultural values. Often others might react in ways that are incomprehensible to you, and when this happens, our emotions often surface. Nowhere is this more evident than in person-to-person interaction! Our tendency to focus on ourselves is natural; however, here **we seek to heighten your awareness to other norms and expectations**. Deals are lost, relationships severed, ties cut because of cultural conflicts—some of the time even subconsciously! We encourage you to recognize this, and take the necessary steps to overcome cultural barriers in your own interactions. After all, once you have overcome your own cultural barriers, they are no longer barriers at all.

# The Metaculture: Our Global Culture

# 2

## 2.1 Introduction

The low hum of conversation in the crowded Paris airport lounge was broken by the sound of the intercom. The speaker's voice instructed passengers to make their way to the gate for the Singapore flight. First the announcement was made in English, then in French, and passengers from around the room one by one rose to their feet. One woman with jet-black hair and wearing a smart, gray business suit laughed into her mobile phone. She spoke softly and quickly in Spanish, and then walked purposefully down the lounge hallway toward the gate, already making another call. Another man sat intently looking into his laptop screen, while two younger women next to him talked quietly to one another. From the kiosk a tall man wearing a long, floor-length robe turned around with the newest Financial Times in his hand. He strode quickly down the hallway towards the gate. Out of the corner of the room a young mother struggling with two toddlers adjusted the strap of her child stroller, and then headed down the hall with one child in the stroller, and holding the other's hand. She passed three teenagers who were completely absorbed in their music, which fortunately was only audible through their headphones.

Does this scene seem familiar to you? Can you recognize yourself in any of these roles? To be sure, not all of these people in the airport are involved in intercultural business, but as you can quickly see, it is still possible to compare these individuals to one another. For example, they could be sub-grouped by age, gender, social class, or ethnicity. More important to our purpose here, however, is to determine **what they have in common**.

What do all these people in this airport lounge have in common? Is there a thread that connects them all, regardless of their culture of origin? The answer is, of course, yes. First, they are all traveling somewhere. This unites them in the common bond of being direction-oriented. Second, they are using rather modern methods of travel, as opposed to culturally-specific ones. Third, there is an unspoken sense of behavioral rules in an airport lounge. Normally, one doesn't talk much to strangers around him or her. Striking up a conversation with the person next to you is possible, but

M. Moll, *The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication,* Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_2,

doesn't always happen. People often seem to exist in a rather individualized world as they travel the planet.

A further point in common is the attention to the announcer. Most times announcements will be made in English, as well as at least one of the languages of the airport host country. This simply means that the chance of passengers knowing some English is high. Another parallel is the passengers' dependence upon technology. Mobile phones, i-Phones, laptops, i-Pads, various music players, etc. are not simply common anymore—these are expected and used continually in our globalized world. How many of these items do you carry with you, especially when traveling? Technology has allowed us to stay connected with one another even over large distances and time gaps.

Importantly, a major connection between all these people is that they all find themselves equal in terms of their surroundings. That is, no one passenger is truly an indigenous member of the airport; in this sense, **each person finds themselves in a situation that is not their original context**.

There are a few important implications that we can draw from these observations. First of all, although some of the individuals were traveling for business reasons and some for personal reasons, they still share quite a few characteristics. Secondly, individualized cultural norms and trends can be superseded by more universal ones in certain contexts. Specifically, **many specific cultural traits might not be visible on the 'surface' level of behavior in globalized environments**. For example, although we were able to make quite a few comparisons between the passengers in the airport lounge, there are many details and variables of their lives and cultures that remain unseen. This of course might seem self-evident, but it helps us to better recognize the shared norms that the passengers have. Furthermore, such shared behaviors are apparent enough and frequent enough to constitute a group of globally shared and expected norms.

This collective sharing of behavioral traits we will call **metaculture**. **Metaculture is made up of the behavior that we share globally, and often forms an external, surface layer of behavior visible to the general public**. Because it is a shared group of norms, we can even conceptualize it as a culture: a culture of globalization (see, for example, Tomlinson 1999; Niezen 2004).[1] Such as Fig. 2.1 are telling because they describe just how widespread certain globalized behaviors have become.

The term metaculture provides us with a convenient tool to look at how people act out their lives within the globalized context—whether they are in a business situation or a private one. It also helps us to define certain traits or values that take on a more universal acceptance. However, since globalization increases our exposure and experiences with others, along with exposure to their norms and practices, the dynamics of our interaction with one another will also change. This means that metaculture, by its very nature, **is constantly being redefined** (consider, for example, the music or fashion industry).

[1] Much has been written about globalization and its effects on culture, but relatively few researchers have actually identified this level of shared behavior as its own distinct culture, or 'cultura franca'.


**Fig. 2.1** Globalized travel—part of the metaculture. (Moll 2011)

In very real ways, the process of globalization has spread many common practices across the surface level of societies. For example, our concept of what the media means today may be very different from what it meant a decade ago, or even a few years ago. Internet journalism, prevalent with the process of globalization, has changed how and when we receive information. When we turn on the television, often the images of newscasters are familiar to us no matter where in the world they are. Styles of news reporting share similarities, especially live reports and interviews. In fact, a recent article in the Jerusalem Post describes the increasing trend of readers becoming viewers ('Why read it when you can watch it?').

The spread of shared behaviors by no means indicates that cultures have lost their individuality; rather the ensuing metacultural layer might be seen as a direct result of the continuing process of globalization. In other words, because people tend to share certain practices globally, and because these practices have often spread throughout our world, we have come to expect them more and more. For example, we often simply assume that a request for a proposal or a bid will follow generally accepted guidelines. Some contracts are written in international formats, and banking procedures are often similar around the world. This means that certain practices have become both accepted and expected around many parts of the world. Figure 2.2 provides a visual explanation of how a metacultural layer might look.

Underneath this layer of shared practices, there remains a vast richness of norms and expectations. This means that the behavior on the surface may or may not match an individual's original cultural norms, but the individual has been influenced by globalization to the extent that she or he shares some behaviors with most other people. In our example of the airport lounge, everyone shared at least the practice of using modern methods of transportation. They also probably shared a lingua franca (English), even if they could speak French.

Well, you might say, since people share globally accepted ways of interacting, why should I need to read another book on the diversity of cultural practice? Remember the iceberg model we talked about earlier? Notice that the majority of cultural mass was found underneath the visible surface of interaction. Some

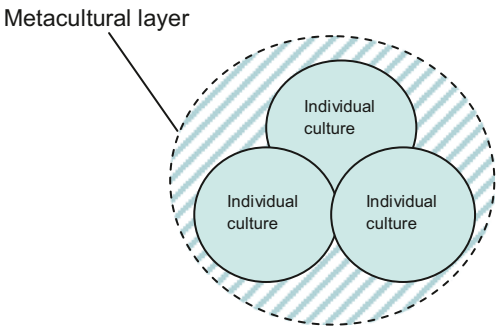



**Fig. 2.2** Visualizing the metaculture. (Moll 2011)

researchers argue that interculturalists only teach people to be good deep-sea divers; we explore only the sub-surface differences among cultures. They recommend what is needed is more attention to shared practices, whether these be in business or otherwise. Others dismiss the metacultural layer, suggesting that such global practices mislead people into generalizations. We believe that analysis of **both** levels is important to have a strong understanding of how intercultural interaction works.

What does all this have to do with intercultural business communication? Good question. In fact, understanding the metaculture is essential in being able to identify where and how some interactions go wrong, and being able to analyze the relevant reasons. Because some behaviors or actions exist interculturally, you tend to focus on such shared norms. The danger of losing or lowering our perspectives of different cultural dimension thus increases. If you think that everyone acts within the level of the metaculture all the time, you will find yourself surprised. You cannot simply assume that shared practices will be accepted by everyone, or will be practiced all the time. For example, shaking hands is one behavior that is often found in the metaculture—but not without exception. Even though it may seem natural to you to shake hands with both men and women in a negotiation, in some cultural contexts this behavior might communicate the opposite of what you are trying to achieve.

One important point in defining a metaculture is that **the shared behavior will not be equally distributed**. In other words, some regions happen to share more norms or behaviors than others do. Obviously, some cultures adopt change faster than others, so most of the time we can trace the spread of the metaculture to time factors. More remote or isolated cultural contexts that showed little similarities with other cultures a decade ago might now display a striking number of shared norms. Furthermore, many of the behaviors that we see in a metaculture are often (though not always) Western cultural patterns that have been spread globally through various media. Globalization has created a unique framework through which we often see our experiences. In other words, as we saw above, the whole notion of culture and globalization implies a ‘paradoxical pact’ where differences are actually the binding feature of a positive relationship.

## 2.2 Our Objectives in This Chapter

In order to understand the quintessence of intercultural business communication, we have to understand the context in which our interactions take place. Therefore, our purpose in this chapter is to highlight what we believe are the essential causes leading to the global metaculture, with special attention to what possible advantages as well as pitfalls or dangers metaculture brings to our interactions. We will look at least four factors that in our view have led to a metacultural level: technology, migration patterns, shared lingua franca, and multicultural generations. You will notice that each of these contributing factors is directly or indirectly linked with international business patterns. Again, we find it to be rather circular: the more business contact we have with one another, the more migration happens or multicultural generations occur, for example. Obviously, not all of our interactions are tied to business contexts, but the process of both globalization and post-globalization are arguably tied to economic advances.

## 2.3 Technology: We are Connected!

How is technology important to the development of a metacultural layer of behavior? The answer is obvious to us in the 21st century: the explosion of technology has led to increased and frequent contact between and among cultures, regardless of time, geographical or political boundaries. Being in constant contact allows people to learn about one another both directly and indirectly. Marshall McLuhan envisioned such a scenario in his notion of the global village. Remember, the global village is the idea that people are connected to one another via technology, no matter how remote or isolated their culture generally is.

One way to portray just what this means is to compare the following statistics of cultural usage of the internet. Now for some of us, usage of the internet is just as much a part of our lives as eating and drinking. In fact, like Fig. 2.3 indicates, we have the ability to access immediate information right in the palm of one hand. However, this has not always been the case around the globe. Clearly the increase of internet usage has been most importantly felt in non-Western cultures over the last few years. One study measured in December of 2009 reports that while internet usage in North America increased 140 % and the EU growth increased by 240 % over the course of the study, the Middle East showed a surge of 1,675 %, and the African continent came in at a whopping 1,810 %! (internetworldstats.com).

The impact of technology on our societies has been enormous. Just one example of how fast technology develops is evident in something that most of us own—computers:

> Today, computers are assisting in the development of new innovations, significantly speeding up the development process. New advances in technology are rendering computers of a year ago obsolete. No sooner is a computer model manufactured than the next one has rolled off the design presses, and no end is in sight. Computer designers are now moving

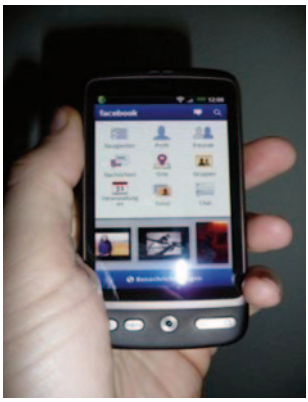


**Fig. 2.3** A connected world at our fingertips. (Moll 2011)

> beyond silicon chips to using DNA chips … a move from geologic roots to biologic roots, making the computer an even closer representation of man. (www.idecorp.com)

Furthermore, the advances of technology have radically changed the domains of medicine, scientific research, space programs, telecommunications, the entertainment industry, etc. Developing technology simply makes life easier for many people. DNA testing, forensic science, biometrics (the science of digitalizing information), banking, financing, advances in alternative forms of fuel, and various advances in fiber optics are some of the many examples where we can see how technology has changed how we live—not only in a specific culture, but globally. In other words, we now have the world right at our fingertips!

The whole process is rather circular. Technological advances have allowed the spread of globalization. In turn, globalization has more widely distributed new technologies.

> Technology and globalization go hand-in-hand. Globalization unleashes technology, which in turn drives firms to plan production and sales on a global basis. Technology changes the work we do and in nearly all cases, the jobs created by it demand more education and training. It also changes the way business operates by transforming relationships between suppliers, producers, retailers and customers. (Ross 1993:13)

Of course, there are disadvantages to globalized technology, as well as presuppositions and dangers, and we shall address these issues later on. For now, let's turn our attention to some of the more evident ways in which technology has connected us.

### 2.3.1 Our Wireless World

Advances in technology have done much to change the way we live and communicate over the past quarter century, but no breakthrough has revolutionized life as much as the advent of the "wireless world," according to a panel of experts assembled by CNN to pick the top 25 ('Top technological advances').

We are mesmerized, it seems, by screens. The media plays one of the single most important roles in both spreading and advancing technology. Information is now available instantly, not just quickly, and most regions of our planet are connected via the Internet. One area that technology and the media have transformed is with news and newscasters. No longer are we dependent on a certain hour for television headlines and news to retrieve important information. In fact, a new form of journalism has taken shape even in the last few years: **participatory journalism**. This type of reporting is not subject to the same constraints that traditional news media might have been. For example, traditional broadcast media was based on a few reporting to many listeners/watchers. Now, individuals can instantly film, photograph, or record important global events and upload these immediately onto the internet, so that we have **many reporting to many**, and in almost real-time parameters.

> New communication technology, including accessible online publishing software and evolving mobile device technology, means that citizens have the potential to observe and report more immediately than traditional media outlets do. Swarms of amateur online journalists are putting this technology to use, on open publishing sites such as Indymedia and on countless weblogs, adding a grassroots dimension to the media landscape. Bloggers and other amateur journalists are scooping mainstream news outlets as well as pointing out errors in mainstream articles, while people who've been made subjects of news articles are responding online, posting supplementary information to provide context and counterpoints. Increasingly, the public is turning to online sources for news, reflecting growing trust in alternative media. (depts.washington.edu)

Even mainstream news broadcasters search out blogs and various uploaded amateur reports for new leads and up-to-date information. CNN, for example, runs a program called iReport, and this program is designed to allow ordinary citizens from around the world to upload breaking news and information. Most of the time, such reports are unedited and uncensored, and often include short videos or images from on-site reports. One example of a venue that has made this information exchange possible is YouTube. YouTube describes itself as **a place for people to broadcast themselves** (Fig. 2.4).[2]

The effects of such a contact venue cannot be overstated: with one click we can both hear and see current, real-life details about people and situations around the world. Steve Jones, professor in the Department of Communication and associate dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, describes the importance of YouTube:

> It's probably safe to say that, over time, as this generation of high school and college students gets older, they will be quite open to getting what we would consider television content via YouTube, and they would probably be comfortable getting other kinds of content via YouTube. So in that respect, I think YouTube has begun the process of moving video to IP-based distribution, independent of traditional or cable networks. (cited in Margolis 2008)

[2] According to Mashable, the Social Media Guide, currently the website has a viewing of about two billion video views per day—highlighting the enormous interest in more personal, real-time reports that are accessible to the general public.


**Fig. 2.4** Digital trends in a globalized world. (digital-trends.com)

In addition to reporting and news availability, technology has had an enormous effect on spreading cultural information and norms through advertising, education, and of course, entertainment. Whether Hollywood, Bollywood, or Dollywood, the entertainment industry is broadcast globally and has affected cultural trends worldwide. Information is not only accessible; it can be frozen in time to repeat over and over, which enhances the educational effects. First videos, then DVD's, and now BluRay® provide ways to maintain information over the constraints of space and time.

Technological advances have thus provided us with very real ways of spreading cultural information and norms in major segments. Music, fashion, religion, politics, various lifestyles, and of course language are all examples of cultural elements that are shared or available in most parts of the world. For example, consider one segment of the fashion industry: blue jeans. Who isn't familiar with blue jeans? What was a late 1900s invention has become a global fashion, and this is largely due to the advertising aspects of mass media. In terms of lifestyle choices, non-canonical relationship patterns such as interracial marriages or homosexuality are now much more a part of global cultural patterns than even a few decades ago. Of course, this doesn't mean these relationship patterns are globally accepted, but it does highlight the effects of increased contact with people who are different from one another.

Another area that has been affected by increased contact is language. Whether in formal education, various forms of music, or the entertainment world, language is constantly changing and grammaticalizing new forms or jargon.[3] Since the lingua franca (in our current era—English) is shared by many cultures, it is logical that large amounts of these new forms will spread, ultimately cementing their usage around the world.

[3] To take one example, over the past decade the phrase "bring someone to justice" has been used repeatedly to describe the goal of the so-called war on terror. This phrase has been used by many world leaders and in public speeches and symbolizes the arrest, incarceration, or even possible death of wanted individuals.


**Fig. 2.5** Global attention to the environment. (mitchell-phillipsdesign.com)

### 2.3.2 Dynamic Nature of the Metaculture

Technological advances highlight the dynamic nature of a metaculture. Fashion, music, movies, political policies, business practices, etc. are constantly changing or adapting to generational preferences. This means that the surface metacultural level of shared norms will also change. What people choose to do or value can fluctuate depending on what is the newest, up-to-date, or currently popular social behavior. For example, consider the top ten lists in the entertainment industry. Movies and music shape both behavior as well as fashion, and we can see how the metacultural level of shared norms is directly tied to what's on a current top ten list.

World events are also a force for the dynamic or changing nature of a metaculture. Recent emphasis on terror networks and the fight against them have radically changed how we experience travel. Security norms have evolved dramatically over the last decade, and passengers are far more used to stringent checks and searches than they were before. No matter which airport you find yourself in, for example, you expect to be closely examined from head to toe by the security personnel before being allowed on a flight.

Positive environmental protection factors have also received a boost from the spread of technology. Because of mass media, global attention has been turned towards important environmental developments and dangers, such as described in Fig. 2.5. More environmentally sensitive ideas such as fuel alternatives are

beginning to nudge major gas guzzlers off of our roads. Bio products can be found in many supermarkets, or ordered online to be delivered directly to the consumer. Technology makes it easy to track attention to environmental care, immediate response to environmental disasters, and a progressive interest in both human and animal rights. In some cases, the progress is slow, but because of increased contact such protection is advancing daily.

In sum, the explosion of technology has indeed created a global village. Contact created as a result of such a virtual village has greatly helped the spread and change of a surface-level of cultural behavior. These shared patterns constitute a real, dynamic level of culture that is noticeable globally.

## 2.4 Migration: Spreading Behaviors

Another major component of the developing metaculture is the effects and consequences of migration patterns. **Migration**, or the moving of people from region to region, is due to varying reasons. In this section, we will examine at least three main causes for human migration, and the impact that this has had on the development of a metaculture.

At least two factors make people change their regional location: **push** and **pull** factors. Push factors are undesirable or unfavorable conditions that force people to leave an area and live somewhere else. Typical push factors could be war, politics, severe weather conditions or events (earthquakes, etc.), or some type of persecution (religious, ethnic, political, etc.). On the other hand, pull factors are those conditions that make it favorable to move somewhere, such as the economy, stronger job markets, stable (safer) weather patterns, political or religious freedom, etc.

### 2.4.1 Politics

Politics has played and continues to play a role in why people move. Wars, regional or ethnic divisions, oppressive regimes, and persecution have created thousands of refugees and sub-communities, at times even involving an entire culture (for example the slaughter of the Tutsi minority of Rwanda in 1994, or the dispersion of Bosnians and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia).

Let's look at some concrete examples of political migration and its effects on the metaculture. During the Vietnam conflict, many political refugees left their home culture and migrated to various parts of Western Europe and North America. With them, they brought their now famous style of excellent cuisine and hospitality, but they also gained a great many Western norms in terms of fashion, language, and higher education opportunities. The mutual exchange of ideas resulting from these contacts has added dimensions to our metaculture by synergizing Southeastern Asian and Western cultures.

Another example of migration due to politics involves the former Eastern European countries. Here the cultural differences might have seemed somewhat smaller, as many European countries share behavioral similarities. But the influx of immigrants into Western European countries brought with it valuable skills as well as flexibility. While some argue that the effects on the job market are negative, other empirical studies show little or no influence of immigration on wages and unemployment rates (Branchflower 2007). The spread of people across the continent, however, brings with it closer interpersonal contacts and exposure to widely accepted popular behaviors. What this means is that our metaculture is susceptible to outside influences that shape and redefine its parameters constantly, but also that the metaculture itself forms individuals coming into its sphere of influence. In other words, there is a cyclical relationship between the metaculture and what influences it.

### 2.4.2 Economy

Patterns of settlement are also tied to a current regional economic status. Simply put, people tend to go where the jobs are. For some, it is a choice, but for others, a requirement for survival. The promise of higher living standards and secure jobs is enough to move people who otherwise might not have migrated. The global recession of the last few years has had an enormous impact on certain cultures, especially those in developing countries.

> During 2008 and 2009 the global economy was rocked by soaring food and fuel prices, the collapse of global financial markets, and a severe contraction in world economic demand. Global economic growth declined from 5.2 % in 2007 to a forecast—1.1 % in 2009. The crisis also caused a significant change in the prospects of developing countries. Economic growth in developing countries in 2009 is projected to be 1.7 %. This is substantially lower than the observed growth rate of 8.3 % in 2007. (ausaid.gov.au)

Some companies try to deal with economic downturns using restructuring processes. In many ways, restructuring only enforces the metaculture, since accepted practices are globally recognized and adopted. Some are even subject to international laws, which are intended to apply across cultures. Other companies have branched out to less chartered cultures in a bid to reduce costs and increase productivity (Fig. 2.6).

In the last few decades, we have seen enormous growth rates in certain areas of the world. For example, many people are finding attractive opportunities in various cities of the United Arab Emirates. Jobs in areas such as business development, product development, pharmaceuticals, and highly sophisticated software development are usually among the most appealing. Other geographical regions that have displayed migratory worker growth in the last few years are Australia, India, and Southeast Asia. Many European countries, such as France, Spain, Italy, Germany, England, and Switzerland, have experienced large influxes of migrants in search of better jobs and better standards of living.

**Fig. 2.6** Foreign business investment in Africa. (entrepreneurnewsonline.com)

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, urbanization resulted from and contributed to industrialization. New job opportunities in the cities motivated the mass movement of surplus population away from the countryside. At the same time, migrants provided cheap, plentiful labor for the emerging factories. Today, due to movements such as globalization, the circumstances are similar in developing countries. Here the concentration of investments in cities attracts large numbers of migrants looking for employment, thereby creating a large surplus labor force, which keeps wages low. This situation is attractive to foreign investment companies from developed countries who can produce goods for far less than if the goods were produced where wages are higher. (globalchange.umich.edu)

### 2.4.3 Growing Communities

Solar energy and environmentally friendly communities, low taxes, modern living services and standards, and increasing know-how to draw upon are just some of the perks offered by new and developing communities. Their goal is to attract the intellectual power and productivity required to turn their region into a thriving, profitable international hub. One campaign boasts being the third reformer in the world for business practices, with attractive investment incentives and ranking 32 of 183 economies in 2010 Ease of Doing Business. Furthermore, the EBRD reports that in 2011 Macedonia will most likely have the highest economic growth in comparison to all countries in the Western Balkans (investinmacedonia.com).

Another major example of the migration across and among cultures can be seen in the European Union. Citizens of the EU now have the opportunity to work, live, and study in any member of the Union. This has the effect of blurring the lines between borders and cultures, and increasing the spread (and sometimes transfer) of norms, values, and expectations throughout Europe. Especially on the geographical border areas one can find the influence of one culture spilling over into another. For example, the 'Dreiländereck' (literally, *three country corner*) of Southern Germany, France, and Switzerland hosts a multitude of different cultures and sub-cultures,

and people tend to speak both French and some form of German on both sides of the border. Cross-border shopping occurs regularly, and although Switzerland is not an official member of the EU this area plays a pivotal role in the economic strength of the whole region.

This kind of population interchange both brings and takes change around the globe. People are introduced to new sounds, new thoughts, new fashions, and new processes. The result is that people are exposed to many single elements of culture or behavioral patterns that they may or may not have been to before. Such patterns and behaviors constitute the ongoing, dynamic level of the metaculture. For example, as we noted above, the fashion element of blue jeans is now soundly spread across the globe. What began as a rather small, regional labor-designed trouser eventually became an integrated part of our metacultural expectations in global fashion.

The sort of contact that creates a surface metacultural level of behaviors and norms heightens our general cultural awareness. In addition, the factors involving technology not only speed up the spread, but also allow ideas to become more lasting and grow roots. Importantly, the process of globalization has become so important that a strong awareness of cultural norms and how these operate **is required** for successful interactions in our current world. In summary, the spreading of behavioral patterns through migration is one very important factor in constructing, maintaining, and strengthening the growing evidence of a metaculture.

## 2.5 Sharing A Code: Our Lingua Franca

Think again about the airport lounge scene we described earlier. One of the major factors uniting all the waiting passengers was their exposure to English. In fact, some researchers estimate that **only one out of every four English users is a native speaker of that language** (Crystal 2003; Seidlhofer 2004). This means that there are three times as many English users as there are native speakers! Using a shared code allows people to communicate with one another among and throughout cultures. Historically, the world has shared a variety of codes; some of the most prominent are Greek and Latin. English is the current lingua franca, and although it is not the only shared code, it is one of the most widely used and accepted.

When people share a code for communicating with one another, we call this code a **lingua franca**. A lingua franca is defined as that **language or construction of a language that is shared for some purpose of intercultural contact (commerce, politics, religion, education, etc.) by people who have different mother tongues**. The development of a lingua franca is also cyclical in that it influences but is also influenced by the peoples that use it:

> The term "lingua franca" originated in Mediterranean ports in the Middle Ages among traders of different language backgrounds. In order to carry on the business of trade, they spoke a common "patchwork" language consisting of bits of Italian mixed with Greek, French, Spanish, and Arabic words. Some of those words are still part of ordinary conversation

> today—in modern English. Nearly every language on Earth has contributed to the development of English. Languages of the Indian subcontinent provided words such as pundit, shampoo, pajamas, and juggernaut. From the Spanish are several words that came to define the spirit of the American "wild west:" mustang, canyon, ranch, stampede, and vigilante are a few examples. English has adopted literally hundreds of words from Arabic and Persian. Though some filtered down through other languages, these words that evoke images from American culture have Arabic origins: tariff, sugar, hazard, jar, almanac, shrub, alcove, alfalfa, syrup, and spinach. Long is the list of words and expressions that came to English from "foreign languages." (globalenvision.org)

There are, of course, many varieties of English, and you might have noticed that pronunciation can make a difference in how well you understand someone else. Still, the basic grammatical patterns and lexicon are shared so that some (even if limited) form of communication can occur. Not only is English spread verbally, it is importantly one of the most written languages. Journals, newspapers, textbooks, treaties, and many forms of entertainment (movies, music, etc.) are written in English. One thing that unites many people is the popular music lyrics of their own generation. In fact, some artists gained global recognition by writing in English, and some non-English countries broadcast English entertainment and programming regularly (for example in the Netherlands).

Nowhere has the importance of English taken such root as in schooling systems. Students are trained to use English, and in many countries this training begins at the earliest schooling age. It is assumed that a communicatively competent person will be able to speak and understand at least some level of English globally, which implies that English is the language of business interactions. Many international jobs require English as a basic necessity to even apply for a position. This does not mean that usage of English is proficiently similar globally, but it does mean that most people with access to technology assume they can at least in part communicate with one another in English. In fact, some international industries, such as aviation, require a certain proficiency in English to provide safe and effective travel to people from around the world.

### 2.5.1 Internet English

Because English has become such an integral part of the internet, it has solidified its position as the globally shared code. What this means is that as English has extended the use of the internet, in turn the internet has proliferated the use of English. Some researchers argue that there is, in fact, no universally acceptable internet language, but the vast majority of users do use it, and to not know English can dramatically isolate someone from information sources. You yourself have probably had a good amount of experience with using English on the internet—regardless of what your native language happens to be. Furthermore, the internet audience size is much larger for English, so even the spreading of cultural traits and information has a stronger chance of diffusion if the material is written in English. See Fig. 2.7 for a breakdown of popular internet languages.

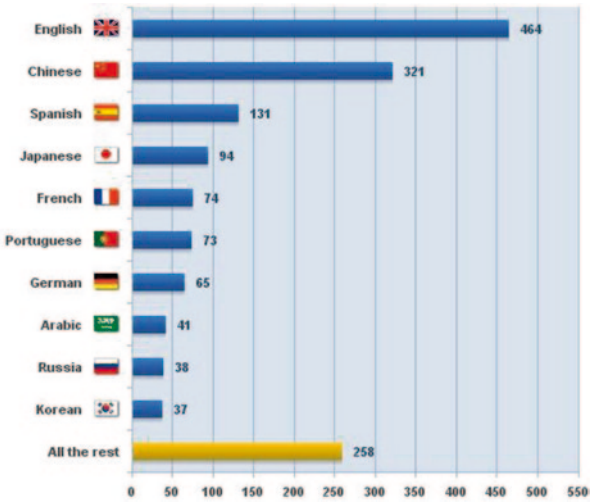



**Fig. 2.7** Internet languages. (witiger.com)

Overall, the Internet provides an excellent platform to read, learn, and use English as a lingua franca. While we agree that maintaining cultural and linguistic distinctives is a critical part of our social identities, we nevertheless recognize the importance of being able to share a code for the spread of information.

Of course, there are those who might argue that only a quarter of the web-users are native English speakers, but this misses the point. The main advantage of the lingua franca is that people share the code, regardless of their own native languages. This means that communication and thus information transfer is possible. Ultimately, a strong lingua franca is a critical element to constructing and maintaining the metaculture, especially when it is used in long-lasting, written form.

### 2.5.2 Shared Symbols and Signs

One important aspect to sharing a global code is the increase and recognition of symbols or signs carrying specific meaning. One organization has compiled the following list of well-recognized symbols which appear globally. You will probably be familiar with most if not all of these symbols (Fig. 2.8).

This particular group of signs is relevant to and for "the crossroads of modern life"—in airports and other transportation hubs and at large international events. This is one way of meeting the need for quick, effective communication globally and can be considered as an integral part of the lingua franca.

Obviously, some signs are regionally and culturally bound, but there are symbols that are recognized globally. This in turn leads to increased contact and sharing of information—the key component to a metaculture. How many times have you gone through a train station or an airport and searched for an automatic bank

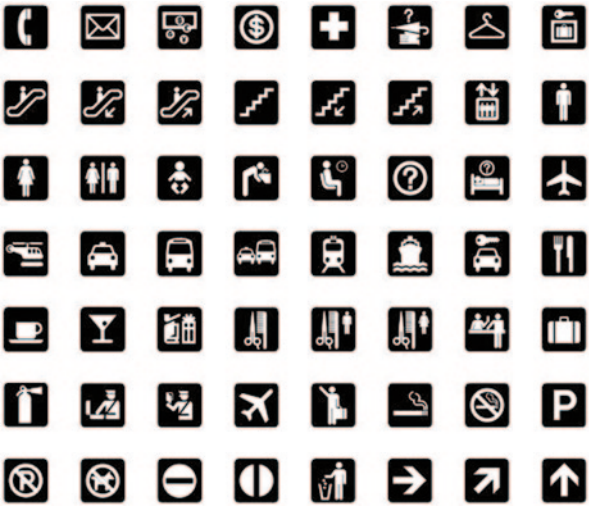


**Fig. 2.8** International symbols. (iamtheweather.com)

machine? Or perhaps you needed medical assistance—chances are that most of us have encountered metacultural signs everywhere.

### 2.5.3 The Effects of Sharing A Code of Meaning

Certain questions come up when dealing with a lingua franca. First of all, does it matter which language the lingua franca is? In fact, there is **nothing special** about English as a language itself—it's not necessarily easier, less complicated, etc. It simply happens to be the one language of commerce that politics (or, as some would say, history) have put into place (at least for the current time). But, as we have seen, it also **helps very much as a global mode of communication**—it makes things quite convenient for us, especially with regard to internet, our lives are much less complicated with one language or shared code of understanding.

Why does it have to be English? **It doesn't**, of course, but for the moment, that is what we use. It might be rather complex to switch now, but of course history will write its own story. In addition to English, Fig. 2.7 shows us that Spanish and Chinese are also widely spoken, and these could be potential candidates for a future lingua franca.

The second, and much more important question is whether cultural norms still matter even if we are all sharing the same code? Absolutely. Most of the time, communication involves some type of **person to person contact**, and both **literal and non-literal** components (body language, gesture, non-verbal communication, etc.). Some might additionally suggest that **a prerequisite for successful interaction is respect and mutual tolerance**. This, of course, is absolutely correct, although perhaps a bit idealistic. Ideally, people should mutually respect and tolerate one another, but, in practice, this is not always the case. If it were, there might not be

such an emphasis on heightening our awareness of intercultural interaction and culturally specific communication norms.

In summary, one of the most important effects of sharing a code is the ability to transfer complex ideas, such as those that build economic, political, and educational movements. A shared code is the lifeline of the marketing and advertising industry. Researchers can share data, and thus come to more rounded conclusions. Schools can standardize tests, both nationally and internationally. Even the entertainment industry relies heavily on a shared lingua franca. And of course, a global code virtually guarantees multicultural participation in the communication process.

## 2.6 Raising Multicultural Generations

There is a fourth major component that is responsible for the development of our current metaculture. This component has to do with the number of people in constant contact with other cultures, and the resulting multicultural generations that have been raised. This has happened for a number of reasons. For one thing, many countries that share borders often blur the cultural distinctions at such borders. As we mentioned above, the *Dreiländereck* is just such a geographical location. Where countries meet politically, so do cultures and lifestyles, and the contact that ensues is one reason that many of the inhabitants in these regions tend to be more multicultural. The same principle applies to many places around the globe; for example, Southeast Asia is a conglomeration of multiple societies and their practices. In the United States, Texas, Arizona, California, and Florida often portray road signs in both Spanish and English, an indication of the different cultures represented in the population.[4]

Not only does multiculturalism occur along borders, it also occurs **within** a region. In some places where multiple ethnic populations are present, it is common to hear children fluent in a few language variants besides that of their parents. So, for example, many people from Macedonia can also communicate quite proficiently in Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, and possibly even Greek. This type of contact is termed **intracultural**, and deals with exchanges between different represented peoples within a political border. Variations in behavior often occur directionally within a country, so that Northern France is quite different from Southern France, and Bavaria boasts its own subculture within Germany, to take a few examples.

[4] Of course, this principle does not imply that contact will be viewed as positive, or mutually beneficial. Many Spanish-speaking members of the Southwestern US complain of various levels of discrimination, and such is the case in a wide variety of border-sharing areas (take, for example, Israel-Palestine, Turkey-Syria, Pakistan-India as a sample).

### 2.6.1 Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

Multicultural people can be raised as such based on the career choices (voluntary or forced) of their parents. Society is replete with people who have grown up in a country or region that is not that of either of their parents. In fact, some people have experienced more than a few major moves in their lives—across and among continents. There are both advantages and challenges to this type of lifestyle, but the fact remains that these individuals are often exposed to much more cultural variation than others, and the influences they learn as they move from place to place are also carried and spread with them.

These global nomads, or **third culture kids** (TCKs) tend to share more with other TCKs than with members of their own parents' culture. TCKs are defined as individuals who have "spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCKs life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background" (Pollack and Van Reken 1999).

TCKs spend a portion of their formative years in a culture or cultures that are not their parents, and many times choose to continue this lifestyle by making career choices involving travel. Often they are open to new ideas, interact fairly well with most people, and do not identify with one single culture (Pollock and Van Reken 1999; Pascoe 2006). The social identity of a TCK is hard to pinpoint, since they tend towards some elements of each of the cultures they have experienced.

Henry R. Luce (1898–1967) is an example of such a TCK. Born to American missionaries living in China, he studied at both Chinese and British schools, and then went on to study at Yale. His personality has been described as slightly socially awkward but highly ambitious, and Luce is best known for his journalism style—short, succinct articles with pictures to appeal to busy, on-the-go people. He founded the well-known Time magazine, and dramatically changed how people received print media in the 19th century (Brinkley 2010). Luce brought with him an appreciation for cultural variety that shaped how he built the Time Inc. empire and how media developed both in the United States and around the world. In very real ways, he changed the way people perceive the government, as well as expanding media coverage from regional to global.

Other influential TCKs include North Korean leader Kim Jung Il, actor Keanu Reeves, singer Engelbert Humperdinck, and Viggo Mortensen (*Lord of the Rings*). Many politicians, including Madeleine Albright, Dominique de Villepin, and Barack Obama also grew up in multiple cultures, and thus carry this influence with them in their public lives and policies.

### 2.6.2 Effects of TCKs on the Metaculture

It would be impossible to compile a complete list of all the effects multicultural people have had on the metacultural level of behavior. In many ways, the spread

of information through and by such global nomads has played an intricate role in solidifying certain societal practices globally. Coupled with the explosion of technology, heavy migration patterns, and a shared linguistic code, multicultural people are **culture carriers**, and expose large portions of the global population to certain cultural norms and expectations. Because of this exposure, social and economic practices are not only practiced, but to some extent expected around the world. It is this level of behavior that makes up our global metaculture.

Certainly such an idea is not immune to challenges. Many would argue that the vast majority of metacultural norms tend towards Western expectations (although such a claim can be subject to interpretation). This is most likely a result of several factors, including the directionality of technological change. Furthermore, one trap is to assume that because there are similarities in behavior on the surface, differences in cultural approaches, expectations, and practices are minimized. The rest of this book will focus on showing why this assumption is both misleading and dangerous to our own intercultural interactions.

## 2.7 Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the basic paradox of metacultural interaction and cultural diversity. We believe that to comprehend this paradox fully, you have to have a good understanding of both levels of cultural interaction. In describing the metaculture and how it operates, we hope to provide you with the necessary framework through which to approach and improve your own future interactions. Furthermore, it is important to understand that while the metaculture represents surface similarities in cultural actions, there is a danger that we can be fooled into thinking that deeper factors, such as cultural values and beliefs, will likewise be the same globally.

In sum, four major factors that have contributed to the development of a globalized culture include technology, migration patterns, a shared language or lingua franca, and the increase of multicultural generations. Most importantly, we have to remember that just as societies and cultures are susceptible to generational change, so the metacultural level is dynamic. Simply put, the more outside influence on the metaculture, the more possibilities it has to change and to adapt to incoming information. Our task is to heighten our own awareness of what it means to be communicatively competent in a globalized world, how similar behaviors can carry different meanings, and learn how to react accordingly. To that end, we now move into the multi-faceted, colorful world of cultural variation.

# Communicating Meaning

# 3

## 3.1 Introduction

Have you ever sat in a meeting and noticed that someone with very good language proficiency still had a difficult time achieving his or her objectives? That is, even though the person could speak the target language or the lingua franca well, they still left the meeting frustrated and without distinctly resolved goals? Most of us have witnessed this at some point or another, or perhaps even you were the one who left with confusion, frustration, or even anger! In this chapter, we are going to talk about how this can happen even to those with strong language proficiencies. On the other hand, you or someone you know may have only an average proficiency, but you still manage to achieve your goals and objectives in your business activities. Why is that?

In order to better understand how problems can arise in our communication, we feel it is imperative to lay a level of groundwork in understanding how communication itself works. But to save you hours of boring academic research, we will present some basic elements of interaction within a few pages, highlighting the most relevant and common patterns we find in all forms of verbal communication globally.

What we will do is take a very close look at communication in action, and to sift through the details in order to glimpse cultural expectations and practices. Our starting point is that communication involves both verbal and non-verbal actions, and meaning can be communicated in a variety of ways. Since we are always interacting with one another, this is where we will begin—with language use. Notice that this does not mean we are talking about proficiency; rather, the important factors here have to do with **how people use the target language** (or lingua franca) in ways that lead to successful or unsuccessful interactions. You might be quite proficient in the language in which you do business, and yet find yourself facing barriers and misunderstandings—maybe even without knowing why this has happened.

Sociolinguists make a distinction between language proficiency and language use. The former of course has to do with how well we master the lingua franca or another language. Language use, however, is commonly referred to as **discourse** (Martin and Nakayama 2007). Discourse is essentially **how people use their**

M. Moll, *The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication,* Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_3,


**Fig. 3.1** Interaction forms a major part of our lives. (learn4good.com)

**language in order to achieve certain purposes**. For example, if someone wants information, one way to achieve this is to ask questions. Another way is to use hints. Depending on the culture involved, the discourse style will vary—sometimes dramatically.

Why do we place such a focus on language use? In fact, language use is by far one of the most critical components in building our communication. Much of our day is spent interacting with others, and often the main or only focus is on how well a person can speak the language of the culture in question. Learning business English might offer you good grammar and lexical skills, but it often does not explain why many cultural misunderstandings occur. We argue here that such an approach is short-sighted and can often leave us with unsuccessful, frustrating interactions.

In this chapter, we will discuss the importance of being communicatively competent, not just proficient in the language. Part of being communicatively competent means that we recognize how much interaction occurs on a daily basis, and how important it is to building personal and professional relationships. As Fig. 3.1 describes, face-to-face interaction plays an enormous role in our daily lives—in spite of massive technological advances. Importantly, we must also discuss how we communicate through other means than verbal language use. Certain choices we make communicate a good deal about what we value, and these are evident in various forms of body language, advertising, written communication, and even symbols, as we shall see.

## 3.2 Our Objectives in This Chapter

The goals for this chapter are to acquaint you with some of the most prominent discourse patterns we find globally, and to define and explain these in ways that will help you to recognize them. Next, we will branch out into culturally specific ways of portraying our norms and expectations using these described patterns. In fact,

many components of communication that we find globally are used differently in different contexts and cultures. **The key for us is to be aware of this fact, and to learn how some of these components might be used in different ways than you are used to from your own cultural background**. All of this will be done through language use, or discourse! In fact, you might be amazed at the level of cultural detail that we can identify when taking apart short segments of talk. Our ultimate objective is to help you to watch for and recognize potential problems or barriers in your own future interactions, and thus to become more successful and communicatively competent in business, and also in private encounters.[1]

## 3.3 Language as Organized Interaction

Language is organized! We can create and use new sentences all the time, using the grammar and lexicon that our language provides us with. In fact, all human languages follow certain rules, and can be both expanded and reproduced over and over. This might not seem so evident to you, especially during those difficult years of language study in school. But in fact, all languages do conform to certain basic rules, and all contain basic interactional features. These rules are not necessarily the same for each language, of course, but there are some principles and guidelines that we find globally. One of the most basic is the concept of **turntaking**, and we examine that interactional component first.

### 3.3.1 Turntaking

Have you ever noticed how people talk to one another? The speaker is usually speaking to some form of audience (this could be a single person or a group), and generally maintains the role of speaker 3 until the message has been given. Then the audience (or individual listener) has the chance to take their turn as speaker, and the roles shift. This continual process of speaker role shift is what we call **turntaking**. Turntaking was formalized by linguistic sociologists Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson in 1974, and since then, scientists have been able to use this structure to compare and examine cultures worldwide. Obviously, there are variations in how cultures take turns, but the basic pattern options are shown in Fig. 3.2. As you can see, in a basic turntaking model, a speaker has a turn, and then there are a variety of options for who gets the next turn. That person then becomes the current speaker, and the whole process starts all over again.

[1] Researchers have come up with different ways of dealing with this issue. One article even suggests following what the author calls the *Ten Commandments* of intercultural communication (Hahn 2005). Here we present a combination of theory and anecdotes so that you can make your own decision on how to act or react.

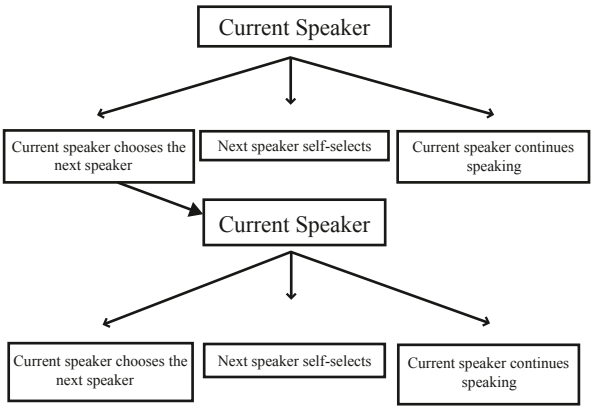



**Fig. 3.2** Turntaking is a part of interaction and takes place in every culture. (Adapted from Sacks et al. 1974)

Don't forget that real interaction takes place so fast, that many times a few seconds can contain several turns. Let's take a look at a real example of this phenomenon. Note how the following interaction consists of 2 turns:

Maria I think we should go to the movies tonight.
John Okay.

Maria is the first speaker, and expresses her objective of going to see a movie. Then she becomes the listener, and John takes his turn as speaker. He can agree, disagree, change the subject, or perform a variety of responses. Here, he chooses to agree. The turns in this interaction are very evident, and relatively simple. Speaker/listener roles are clear.

Not all turns are this simple, however. Speakers can be a single person, a group of people, or even an entity or organization. Listeners also can consist of multiple people, or can even be the general public (such as when a politician gives a speech). Furthermore, turns can be structured with questions, hints, commands, long speeches or short, partial words, or even simply a sound. Here's an example:

Maria I think we should go to the movies tonight.
John Okay.
Maria There's a really good romance comedy playing.
John Hmmm.
Maria You don't want to see it?

In this interaction, Maria and John take their subsequent turns, but in John's second turn he doesn't actually speak. Instead, he makes a short *hmmm* sound during his turn. This sound achieves his turn-taking without actually using any explicit language. Note that Maria recognizes both the turn, and the sound, and interprets it as a sort of disagreement for the romance comedy idea. Although John has not actually spoken words, he has still conformed to the basic pattern of turn-taking, and Maria now knows she can take her next turn.

What this example highlights is the existence of turns even with a minimal use of language (in fact, try replacing the *hmmm* with silence and you will find the very same effect in this interaction). People tend to take turns in what and how they communicate, and the roles of speaker/hearer are relatively clearly defined. Business communication is no different. People will use the basic turntaking pattern within meetings, negotiations, interviews, etc. There are times when turns will be longer than the examples here (as in, for example, a presentation) but the structure remains the same generally.

Turns are used to accomplish all sorts of interactional tasks. You can ask and respond to questions, give or receive information, agree or disagree with someone on a topic, give or respond to a command or order, or even give or receive compliments or critique. We greet one another with turns, we say good-bye with a turn structure—in fact, the list of what we do with turns in language goes on and on. You can probably think of many ways that turns work in your own discourse, and in your own cultural environment. Each of these turn groupings we will call **sequences**; for example, here is a **question/answer sequence**:

Maria What would you like to drink?
John Water, please.

Here the structure is clear. Question/answer sequences occur all throughout our interactions, and help us organize how we transmit information to one another. The same goes for greetings, closings, agreements, etc. Again, not all turns are performed individually—turns can be taken collectively as well. Speakers/listeners can be in groups, or even in an organizational format.

Not all turns proceed so neatly or simply. There are times when the turn sequence is broken, halted, or extended. Based on the context of the interaction (situation, speakers, topic, etc.), there is a lot of variety in how the turns proceed. At times hierarchy or situation determines who gets to be the speaker—for example, the manager, vice-president, or CEO often has a greater perceived 'right' to initialize turns, or to take on the speaker role because of their higher level on the hierarchy. You will notice that certain factors play a greater role in organizing turntaking depending upon the context.

### 3.3.2 Face to Face Interaction

Is there a global principle that we can observe in turn sequences? In fact, **communication does not occur in isolation**. For communication to actually occur there has to be at least one communicator, and at least one communicatee. In other words, there must at least be a speaker and some intended audience. This is a behavior that we can recognize globally, and so we will use it as a starting point for understanding human interactions. Furthermore, turn sequences always contain some sort of message; that is, trivial or non-trivial meaning is evident in turns globally. Whether or not the speaker is successful in communicating her or his meaning is a different issue—here we can say that all turn sequences are subject to some objective or intent of the speaker.

**This does not mean that each culture or situation will take turns in exactly the same ways**. What is important for us here is to note that these turn sequences exist, and are the basic means of communicating with one another. However, one of the most visible cultural differences in interaction has to do with **how** a culture organizes and takes their communicative turns. This is a critical aspect to our discussion here, and will form the basis of most of our examples in this and the following chapters.

To summarize, we are saying that human communication is the primary basis for all of our interaction, be it intracultural or intercultural. The analysis of language as a means of examining how people do things and make sense of the world around them has been emphasized by many sociologists, philosophers, and cultural researchers, including Wittgenstein (1973); Austin (1962); Sacks et al. (1974), and more recently Duranti and Goodwin (1992); Hall (1982, 1990) and Hill (2008).

## 3.4 Communicative Competence

As we noted above, discourse represents how language is used in our interactions. The issue is not necessarily our proficiency, but rather how we use the language to accomplish our various objectives. As you can guess, an important part of how successful we are depends upon whether or not we can transmit and receive messages appropriately. We use language to both perform tasks and to act out our social relationships with one another. Knowing how language relates to our social world is having **communicative competence**.

Remember, as we have pointed out, this term does not simply mean language proficiency, although it can of course include proficiency in its definition. Instead, **being communicatively competent means that you understand how the language is used in relation to various contexts**. For example, take another look at our short question/answer sequence from earlier:

Maria What would you like to drink?
John Water, please.

This sequence works because both Maria and John understand what a question/answer sequence is, and both choose to perform it as such. But what would happen if John left this normal pattern and chose a different type of sequence response:

Maria What would you like to drink?
John I'm going camping next week.

Here we would encounter a problem; namely, that John has broken the expected question/answer pattern and has not answered Maria's question. The communication could repair itself, stall, or even break down in this instance. We learn several principles from this example. First, communication is usually intended to be understood. Maria has asked an information question, and most likely is expecting a specific answer to that question so that she can decide what drink to give John.

> One of the most interesting facts about communicative intentions is that they are intended to be recognized. When speakers try to communicate something, they intend to be understood as trying to communicate, and they are successful in communication when the hearer recognizes that intention. Thus, for a speaker to request hearers to do something and be successful in the communication, hearers must understand not only what is being requested but also that they are being requested…communication breaks down if the speaker intends the utterance one way and the hearer intends it another way. (Akmajian 1990:319)

Second, a speaker who is communicatively competent is expected to understand how the language functions in the overall social context, so that John should know that he is expected to answer Maria's question with a statement about what he wants to drink, not about what he will be doing next week. In business communication, we find exactly the same communicative competence requirements:

Maria Have you finished the blueprints yet?
John We thought we could go Chinese for lunch.

It's not hard to see that John has not only ignored Maria's question here, he has also completely changed the subject. Now, from Maria's point of view, John could be avoiding her on purpose, which would mean that he has some reason for not providing the information (maybe he is not finished, or maybe he doesn't want to show her the blueprints). Nevertheless, the fact that this question-answer sequence sounds so strange is because we expect a certain kind of an answer to Maria's question. Not providing this will cause John to either be viewed as incompetent, inattentive, or strategically avoiding the topic.

Universally speaking, we tend to build most of our interactions on the principle of communicative competence. In fact, we often simply assume that the other person(s) are or will be communicatively competent. What complicates this process is the fact that communicative competence is a learned quality—as we grow and become more culturally socialized, we learn what is expected in our cultural context.

A person who does not possess strong communicative competence will often display certain social inadequacies. For example, a young child may or may not yet have learned what the sequence of telephone questions mean:

Caller Hi. Is your mother home?
Child Yes. (***2–3 second pause***)
Caller Well may I speak to her, please?
Child Okay.

In this instance, the child has not yet learned to recognize that the question 'Is your mother home?' actually includes the request to speak to her. So for the child, answering with simple information is enough. This is not what the caller was intending, and therefore the caller had to ask an additional question to achieve his or her goal of talking to the mother.

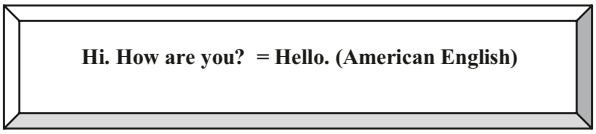
We can smile at this example because it involves a young child, but the reality is learning how to be communicatively competent, that is, knowing how a language

is used appropriately, is an ongoing process. In fact, when we are interacting in other cultures, our own communicative competence has to be learned in much the same way as the child in our example. **Knowing how the language communicates meaning in another culture might be very different from how it works in our own cultural context.** Here the challenge is that we don't have the necessary communicative competence for the culture in question, and therefore we run the risk of creating misunderstandings, barriers, or unsuccessful interactions. This means that we hear and understand the talk in ways that match our own expectations or cultural norms, and respond to it accordingly. However, the speaker might have had a different expectation, and then our response could clash with their norms. Thus, sharing the interactional turn-taking sequence might seem **on the surface** to make communication simple, while in reality it can be quite complex.

Here's another example of what we mean. In the US, often greetings are ritualized into a question sequence. For example, Americans tend to use the following greeting form:

Speaker A Hi. How are you?
Speaker B Hello. How are you doing?

What is tricky about this greeting ritual is that it is structured in a question/answer sequence, but doesn't actually intend to perform the information function that the question would imply. Instead, often Americans use the small package of words as a simple greeting ritual. In this case, the sum total of the words contains a greeting functional intent:




You have probably all experienced this ritualized greeting at some point. For our discussion here, a communicatively competent speaker would recognize this, and not give an information answer to the question 'How are you?':

Speaker A Hi. How are you?
Speaker B I'm doing terrible and couldn't sleep all night.

Such a response would be very unexpected, and sound strange to the first speaker. In fact, Speaker B's response could even cause Speaker A to feel awkward or uncomfortable:

Speaker A Hi. How are you?
Speaker B I'm doing terrible and couldn't sleep all night.
Speaker A Oh… uh—I'm sorry.

Here Speaker A apologizes in his turn, even though he might have absolutely nothing to do with the status of Speaker B. In fact, what has happened is a case of **communicative incompetence**, so that Speaker A's expectations have been violated and he now feels flustered with the communication. The [greeting + question] sequence is a highly ritualized form that is not usually asking for the state of the hearer's physical or mental being. In the above example, Speaker A is thrown off, confused, and searches for a response. We can see how Speaker A then apologizes, even though he probably has had nothing to do with Speaker B's problem—they may, in fact, have just met! "The apology might be a token of sympathy for Speaker B's problem, or it may be that violation of the norm makes Speaker A feel that he or she is somehow the cause of the problem" (Moll 2003:14). Either way, what we can see from this example is that expectations and norms can be violated even when using similar interactional forms, such as turn sequences (in this case, for a greeting).

Being communicatively competent is critically important if we expect to be successful in our interactions. That is why we place such an enormous emphasis on language use, or discourse, in our approach. Language is one of the major ways that we constitute our social life and societies, and has even been called the "primordial locus of sociality" (Schegloff 1987). We cannot study cultural communication without understanding that **interaction is governed by principles, and that these can differ from culture to culture**. Even within our own cultures, most of our day is dominated by either talking or listening to someone. We interact constantly, and this dynamic process both shapes and is shaped by our social context. Intercultural communication is even richer in the sense that cultural worlds intersect right where our norms and expectations are evident—in our interaction.

Importantly, our reactions to intercultural interactions—whether these are business or private—will often be tied to our expectations. If you expect someone to answer your question directly, and they don't, you can get flustered or misinterpret their answer.

In order to both illustrate and help you to understand the complexities of intercultural communication, we will now turn our attention to very specific cultural patterns, and how these are used differently in different cultural contexts. You will note that many patterns which look similar on the surface in fact are not used in the same ways throughout and among cultures. **Being aware that these differences exist is the first step in our communicative competence, and an important part of achieving more successful interactions**.

## 3.5 Cultural Patterns

How do people act and relate to one another culturally? How do they perform greetings, negotiations, wedding rituals, religious events, speeches, funerals, discussions, disagreements, and so on? The answer to these questions is found in the notion of behavioral trends, or patterns, and we can identify several of these globally. People in cultural groups, whether this be regional, ethnic, or even

**Fig. 3.3** Greetings styles differ from culture to culture. (corbis.co.in; asylum.com; pbase.com; theapricity.com; examiner.com)

political, tend to share similar behaviors. Earlier in this text, we noted that culture is essentially the way or ways people interact with one another within their social setting. In fact, this definition is also cyclical in the sense that we define a culture by the behaviors its members share. So, for example, people living in Niger, West Africa will greet one another in different ways from those living in Japan. In Columbia, South America, turn-taking is quite different in structure from that in Austria or Switzerland.

The ways in which people in a culture interact, socialize, and relate to one another and their surroundings are what we call cultural patterns. **A cultural pattern is a recognized behavior or group of behaviors that defines and is defined by the people who perform it**. What this means is that a cultural pattern is the norm for how to act in a given culture. It is also the **expectation** of the members of that culture, so that most people will expect a certain pattern of behavior from communicatively competent members of their society (Fig. 3.3).[2]

One of the dangers of identifying cultural patterns is falling into the trap of stereotyping. Here our purpose is not to stereotype, or make overgeneralizations, but rather to **identify trends** that are evident in all analyses of cultural behavior, and to make some observations about how people interact. Once again, we are aware that there are exceptions to most generalizations, and that context and situation play an enormous role in how we interact with one another. A person in a panic situation will probably react quite differently than that same person in a calm, collaborative

[2] Here again the metaculture will often play a role—a handshake can serve as a globalized greeting. However, this is not always the case, since certain cultures forbid forms of contact, including between men and women. Also, and importantly, just because a behavior is found in the metaculture does not mean that everyone will expect or even accept it.

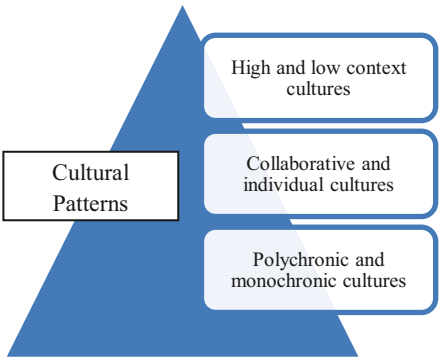



**Fig. 3.4** Cultural patterns. (Moll 2011)

context. On the other hand, being able to identify trends in human behavior will go a long way in increasing our awareness of how cultural interaction works.

In order to identify and examine various cultural patterns, we will draw upon the work of Edward T. Hall, who has been instrumental in defining both culture and cultural patterns, and is well-known for his position that **culture is communication**. Previously we made the case that one of the best places to look for cultural distinctive is within our interaction, or language use. Now we will try to set the parameters for identifying and observing various behaviors.

Over time, researchers have defined many categories for looking at culture; some of these overlap and coincide with one another, and some cater to more discipline-specific research. You have probably encountered other ways of looking at cultural behavior, or of classifying culture types, and many of these are valid and relevant. Importantly, no one model of cultural communication is complete. Instead, all are abstractions of sorts, and usually designed to examine the kind of data the researcher is looking for. However, in order to provide a more coherent overview of our cultural data, we are going to adopt certain parameters or theoretical constructs. In advance, we recognize the limitations of such an approach, but argue that some categorization is necessary to achieve our stated objectives. Further, it is important that the categories be general enough to be adaptable to many sorts of behavior, and account for substantial amounts of communication data. With this in mind, we have adopted the following culture type constructs (Fig. 3.4).

None of these patterns operate in isolation from the others. In fact, what we can see are various trends in how these patterns are linked to one another. For example, many high context cultures also tend to be collaborative and polychronic. On the other hand, various low context cultures highly value individualism and tend to approach time monochronically. In making this statement, we do remember the danger of simply stereotyping all members of a certain society into one or another group. However, social scientists have made good progress in identifying trends or tendencies with regard to cultural norms.[3]

[3] Here we note the many contributions of E.T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Fons Trompenaars, just to name a few.

### 3.5.1 High and Low Context Cultures

Because in this book we are talking about communication, we will make the notion of **high or low context** our first and most basic division to describe culture types.[4] Incoming messages don't simply operate in a vacuum, but instead depend upon a good deal of contextual information for interpretation and the meaning to be recovered. The amount of contextual information that members of various cultures tend to use in communicating with one another is what is meant by high and low context. Specifically, a **high context culture** is one in which much of the meaning or intended interpretation of the talk is found in the context or situation of the speakers, and less information is contained in the actual talk itself. A **low context culture** is one in which speakers encode much more of the specific information in the talk segment, and less information is shared in the situational context in which they find themselves. As Hall puts it:

> A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. Twins who have grown up together can and do communicate more economically (HC) than two lawyers in a courtroom during a trial (LC), a mathematician programming a computer, two politicians drafting legislation, two administrators writing a regulation. (1990:6)

In other words, high context communication is used in situations where participants can make sense of incoming information **without a direct or explicit encoding of the intended message**. For example, consider the following short interaction between Maria and John:

Maria Are you thirsty?
John What would you like to drink?

Here the question-answer sequence has been broken, but for a very specific purpose. Maria, on the surface, seems to be asking John for information, but he interprets her talk as a request. In fact, he simply skips to the choice of drink that Maria would like. In this example, Maria has not explicitly communicated that she would like John to get her a drink, but based on their relationship and his familiarity with her style of communication, he knows that she wishes for a drink. This part of the message is essentially encoded in the context of the situation, which at the least includes Maria and John's relationship, their styles of communication, and his ability to perform her request. The amount of information that John recovers from the context is thus **higher** than what is included in Maria's short, indirect question.

Low context communication works just the opposite way. Most of the message is **encoded in the actual talk directly or explicitly**, so the speaker/listener can give

[4] Obviously other researchers (i.e., Trompenaars) might make a different basic division, depending upon their particular focus towards the research data.

and retrieve the meaning efficiently. For example, many Western cultures can be described as low context:

> This style of communication, which emphasizes explicit verbal messages, is highly valued in many settings in the United States. Interpersonal communication textbooks often stress that [Americans] should not rely on nonverbal, contextual information. It is better, they say, to be explicit and to the point, and not to leave things ambiguous. (Martin and Nakayama 2007:220)

Germans also predominately use a low context communication style. Germans tend to be very direct, to the point, and often highly value efficient messages. The assumption is that the message itself is relevant and contains the required information for meaning recovery.

To illustrate the differences between high and low context communication further, consider the following two request types:

**Request 1 Please go and get me the logistic data.**
**Request 2 I really need that logistic data.**

The more direct, and therefore **low context** request type is Request 1. There is little additional interpretation that the listener needs to do in order to know exactly what is expected of him or of her. On the contrary, Request 2 is structured much more as a need statement by the speaker. The listener can deduct that she or he is expected to get the logistics data for the speaker, but the listener can also interpret the sentence as simple information, and not understand that it is an indirect request. The context of the situation thus plays a much higher role in the interpretation of Request 2, making it a **high context** request type.

### 3.5.2 Collaborative and Individual Cultures

Tightly tied to high and low context communication is the notion of speech styles, which often communicate how collaborative or individualistic a culture is. Looking at the structure of language, we can easily see that there are several ways in which to say the same thing. Here we encounter what we earlier called the 'message packaging' aspect of communication. One way to package a message is simply to say it directly, without any extra softeners or politeness markers. This is what we call **direct speech style**, and is common in quite a few low context cultures. A phrase such as:

► This report is not complete.

Would be an example of a direct speech style statement—the phrase only contains the subject, verb, and complement in its structure.

However, there are other ways to portray the same meaning. In English, for example, speakers can use extra words called 'hedges' which will soften the impact of

their message to the hearer(s). Such hedges can be modals (could, would, should, etc.), or can be polite words (please, possibly, etc.), or can even be question formats. When a speaker wishes to soften the impact of a message, we say that the speaker is using an **indirect speech style**. There are lots of reasons for this—personality and face-saving norms, cultural politeness requirements, and even political correctness can play the motivating role in why speakers might want to use an indirect speech style. Often (not always), the speech style used will also be correlated to the high/low cultural context distinction.

Here's an example of what we mean. Suppose that your boss has called you in to discuss the monthly report which you have submitted. Let's also suppose that the monthly report is not quite as detailed as it should be, since you were under time pressure and didn't have all the required information you needed to complete it. You knew this, but submitted it anyway to meet the deadline. As you enter her office, your boss frowns at the report on her desk:

Boss There's a lot of information missing from this report. It doesn't give me a good overview of the figures for the month.

The obvious lack of data is clearly causing an issue in this situation, and your boss uses a direct speech style to voice her displeasure. In this case, you can easily recover the meaning as well as your boss's perspective from just the words in her turn. She is using direct speech style, and most likely is a member of an individualistic culture, where such a style is socially acceptable and even expected. However, suppose she says the following:

Boss You must have been very busy this week, right?

In this turn, your boss doesn't even mention the report. Instead, she poses a rather sympathetic question about your high level of activity during the past week. A close look at her turn, however, reveals that in conjunction with the report on her desk, and the fact that she has commented on your business, she is in fact making a statement about the report. A communicatively competent speaker should be able to recover at least some of the underlying meaning in this question (i.e. that the boss is not happy with the report). While the first turn is in a direct style, the second is more of a hint, and thus the meaning of the turn has to be recovered other than with the boss's words. This is what we mean by an indirect speech style. Essentially, the basic message in the first and the second example is the same, but as we can see, there are two very different ways of packaging that message!

Another way that speech styles are relevant culturally is that speakers have a range of request types (also called directives) at their disposal, and which one they choose to use will tell a lot about the expected communication style of their culture. Consider the simple phrase 'shut the door'. You can choose to express this phrase directly, or indirectly. On a scale of directness, we can identify at least 6 ways to grammatically structure this request. Figure 3.5 illustrates the possibilities speakers

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| + Direct | **Bald imperative** | Shut the door! |
| | **Need statement** | I need the door shut. |
| | **Embedded directive** | Could you please shut the door? |
| | **Permission directive** | Could I possibly shut the door? |
| | **Question directive** | Why don't you shut the door? |
| + Indirect | **Hint statement** | It is too cold in here. |

**Fig. 3.5** Direct and indirect requests. (Moll 2011)

have at their disposal (of course, the structure will vary from language to language, but the conception of scale remains).

You will notice that the more to the point or straightforward requests tend to fall on a more direct side of the scale, while hints and question requests often appear on the more indirect end of the scale. From the aspect of grammar, therefore, we can clearly see how these requests are formed differently. However, the ultimate meaning remains the same for each of these structures: the speaker would like the door to be shut. How people decide which request type to use will depend upon the context of the situation, which of course will largely include their culture type. Low context and individualistic cultures tend have no problem with more direct styles, while high context and collaborative cultures often find these styles offensive and will avoid them at most costs. On the other hand, low context cultures often see indirectness as unnecessary, and sometimes even less than frank.

> Some cultures, such as Germany or Israel, tolerate quite high levels of directness. In fact, in some places, open, frank, and often quite blunt utterances are the norm for conversations. Many German and Israeli speakers and hearers do not interpret direct talk as rude or offensive; rather it is part of the normal cultural makeup. Germans, for example, often will pride themselves on being direct. Some Germans find an embedded directive such as:
>
> Could you possibly get that proposal back by Friday, please?
>
> overdone and foolish-sounding. Such hearers view this type of communication as not necessary, and wonder why a person would need to fill up their sentences with hedges and politeness markers. A bald imperative, in their view, is much more efficient. For the level at which directness is tolerated in their culture, of course, they are right. Directness is more efficient in that the meaning recovery load is lighter for hearers. However, enormous social problems can occur when someone from a highly direct culture uses their conversational norms in a place or culture where indirectness is higher valued and seen as polite. (Moll 2004:33)

This basic division between high and low context cultures is not simply a description of how direct or indirect people are, however. Instead, the terms high context and low context describe how people approach and organize information, social activities, and see their relationships vis-à-vis one another. So, for a high context message to be transmitted, the speaker makes certain assumptions. **High context cultures** tend to place a heavy emphasis on face-saving, so that maintaining and not losing face is very important. This means that a high context communication will typically be structured in what we might see as a polite form, such as:

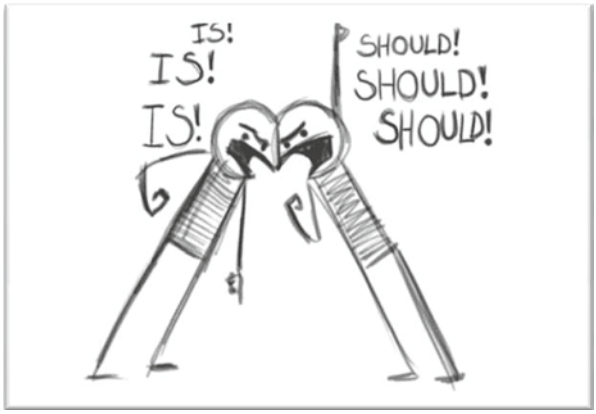



**Fig. 3.6** Contrasting direct and indirect style. (wordpress.com)

► If you don't mind, could you please shut the window?

Such a sentence is extensively loaded with 'softeners' such as modals, politeness forms, and a question structure. However, the effects of high context communication don't stop with the grammar. People who use high context communication will typically **not** want to directly say no or refuse the other party. For example, some researchers found that members of certain culture types will make up an answer before they will fail to give one: when asked for directions, some Algerian students will create imaginary directions even if they don't have the necessary information in order to avoid not being able to give an answer.[5] Interestingly, such practice is found in a variety of cultures globally—the emphasis is on external collaboration with the listener, rather than simple information transfer. Agreement, at least on the surface, is of critical importance for a person using high context communication. Many smiles cover outright disagreement in certain Asian circles; the importance of maintaining face and keeping the situation polite takes precedence over other factors in the interaction.

Illustrations such as found in the cartoon in Fig. 3.6 exemplify the conflict that people encounter when deciding how to package their messages. The essential difference in presenting factual information is often tied to whether a person comes from a high or low, direct or indirect speech culture.

### 3.5.3 Polychronic and Monochronic Cultures

High context communicators often see time as a flexible entity, and place less importance on punctuality than low context communicators. Here we find a significant connection with the concept of **polychronic** cultures. In fact, for a high context person, the goal or objectives is often of much stronger importance than the means or process (including timeline) by which it is achieved. This might be liberating

[5] Personal communication with the author.


**Fig. 3.7** How polite is too polite? (wordpress.com)

for the high context person, but of course can create great difficulties when doing business with a schedule-oriented, punctual, low context type. We will return to this point specifically later in the chapter.

High context people will also tend towards a **collaborative** interaction with society around them. Instead of individual achievement, high context communicators stress solidarity and an emphasis on the group as a whole, which means that certain social categories are regularly mixed. Employers might even be seen as connected with whole families or groups in the sense of the employee's well-being. For example, asking a high context communicator about his or her family is usually seen as acceptable and at times even desirable for building your long-term business relationship. Such a practice is much more limited among low context communicators.

In conjunction with group solidarity, high context cultures often place strong emphasis on hierarchy and the traditions shaped by the history of the culture. For high context communicators, therefore, titles can be very important. Not using a title in a high context situation might lead to serious misunderstandings and feelings of disrespect. Politeness is also more evident in a high context, polychronic culture, since the emphasis will often be stronger on historical and hierarchical factors than on efficient, schedule-based frameworks. In fact, as we see in Fig. 3.7, cultures that strongly value hierarchy will often put more emphasis on politeness, dignity, and face saving than on other contextual factors.

For **low context** people, the emphasis on politeness and face-saving is not as marked. Low context communicators will tend to be much more direct, but not just in the grammar. For example, low context people place enormous emphasis on punctuality and reliability; schedules are important and an efficient logistical structure is critical. Here is where the concept of low context communication will overlap with the notion of a **monochronic** culture type. In terms of **individualism**, low context cultures often will separate social categories of work, family, entertainment, etc. into clear divisions. You might have even experienced this yourself—do you mind if someone talks about personal matters in the workplace, or inquires about your own personal life? Asking a casual German or Austrian business acquaintance

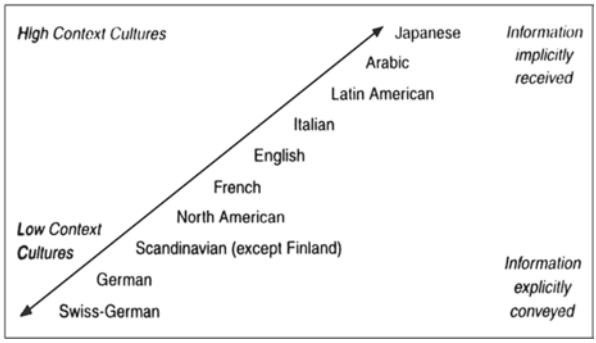



**Fig. 3.8** Sample of ranking high and low context cultures. (jic.com)

about their family life is much less likely, since these categories have historically been treated as separate domains (although we might notice a bit of change in this area, we can still recognize strong tendencies to keep work and private life separate in low context cultures).

Using titles and forms of respect are not as expected in a low context situation (although this does depend upon the context somewhat). In low context cultures, such as the US and Canada, first names are acceptable even among casual work colleagues. This practice is aimed at equalizing the workforce and creating higher individual morale. The opposite is the case for cultures which highly value hierarchical systems. For example, a communicatively competent speaker will avoid calling a superior by their first name in a culture that places a high emphasis on hierarchy. Instead, maintaining a certain social distance in both role and rank is required in such situations. Being aware of this practice can make all the difference in how successful the interaction ultimately is.

Great, you say. All this information is interesting, but how can I apply it into my intercultural business interactions? In fact, is there some way to identify those cultures which tend to differ in terms of low and high contexts so that I can prepare adequately? According to the Journal of Intercultural Communication (Pistillo 2003), it is possible to provide a basic ranking of certain cultures on the scale of low-high context. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list, nor is this categorization based on absolutes, but again we are speaking of trends visible in cultural behavior and norms (Fig. 3.8).

In the following chapters we will take the constructs we have examined here to analyze cultural behavior in various contexts and situations. Before we move on to the detailed look at both verbal and non-verbal interaction, though, we feel that it is important to reiterate the relationship between these cultural patterns. Like we noted above, cultures do tend to link their preferences of the various patterns into groups. Many cultural and social scientists have been able to link various forms of behavior to the low-high context distinction. For example, consider Fig. 3.9.

Of course, it is important to remember that these observations are describing trends, not absolutes, and that there is a certain level of variation even within these groupings. Cultural categories do overlap one another. For example, some members

**Fig. 3.9** Cultural pattern groupings. (Moll 2011)

| Low Context Culture | High Context Culture |
|---|---|
| Individualistic and personal achievement | Collaborative and group-focused |
| Focus on present | Focus on history and tradition |
| Monochronic time approach | Polychronic time approach |
| Tend towards direct speech styles | Tend towards indirect speech styles |

of a low context culture will use more indirect speech styles, especially for specific strategies within the interaction.[6]

Furthermore, there is a trend developing in some typically high context Asian cultures that connects the individual with their achievements, so that a pay-for-performance (P4P) strategy is evolving. However, it should be noted that this development is very specifically centered on short-term projects, whereas most long-term Asian societal compensation is tightly tied to group or organizational achievement.

## 3.6 Summary

Communicating meaning is a complex undertaking, especially when we are operating in a culture that is unfamiliar to us. Being proficient in a language is simply not enough to ensure successful interactions. We have to understand what sorts of behavior we expect, and how our language usage has been organized to communicate our expectations. There are a variety of tools to help us understand how people communicate with one another; turntaking and the structure of our talk sequences are a few examples of these. Knowing how language works in our own cultural context can often help us to understand how other contexts might display different patterns. A critical aspect of this chapter is to heighten our own general awareness of communicative interaction, and especially to recognize when a culture differs from our own norms and expectations.

In this chapter we have also explored the constructs that make up culture types, and have divided these into mainly two groups: low context cultures and high

[6] One example of this has to do with societies that are tightly tied to political correctness. In such environments, a direct style often takes on an offensive tone, so that speakers are taught from early childhood that 'being polite' means using an indirect speech style. This is becoming the case in much of North America; especially with regard to both race and gender a direct style is often not tolerated by members of the culture.

context cultures. Within these groups there are trends in how people relate to time and how they see themselves within the larger scope of the group or society. We defined the notions of monochronic and polychronic time usage, as well as what it means to be a collaborative or an individualistic culture.

Equipped as we are now with such tools, we will move on in the next chapter to more specific analyses of how people interact with one another, and how cultural expectations and assumptions are readily apparent through such interaction. Now we will take apart the details of turns and talk in order to discover how interactants portray themselves and the events unfolding in the world around them.

# Verbal Communication in Action

# 4

## 4.1 Introduction

Fair enough, you say. From what we've talked about so far, it's clear that communication follows certain structures, and cultures display certain basic ways of approaching life. But does this make that much difference for my business communication? After all, in business we're mainly talking about facts, figures, processes, and dates most of the time, right?

Let's go back to our starting point. We said at the very beginning that business communication is just as prone to cultural misunderstandings and problems as any other sort of communication, even when sharing the same language. As our intercultural communicative competence increases, we should notice a greater awareness or sensitivity to these sorts of differences among cultures. Competence will increase with both time and practice, and of course preparation plays a major role in how successful we are with the target culture. To that end, we will now show you some real business discourse examples that highlight how cultural factors can make or break our interactions with others.

Specifically, we are going to analyze short sections of business talk which involve multiple cultures and interactants. Each section of talk contains only a few lines and represents several seconds of real conversation. The dialogues display short, time-bound strips of talk that might seem, on the surface, to be well-organized and problem-free. However, each dialogue contains implicit or explicit evidence of cultural expectations being violated or misinterpreted. Our task now will be to recognize the problem or problems and then to trace them back to the speakers' underlying assumptions. Interaction involves a delicate balance between speaker and hearer—we will practice analyzing what this means.

The dialogues are drawn from two primary sources. Most of the dialogues represent years of research into intercultural business meetings (cf. Moll 2000). Some of the dialogues have been slightly adapted from a compilation by Storti (1994), but all of the resulting discussions are drawn from years of real discussion, responses and interpretations. You will notice that we are not trying to stereotype human behavior, but rather to make some observations that are consistent over time and space across

M. Moll, *The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication,* Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_4,

culture types. Again, we also recognize the importance of contextual factors, such as personality, and individual situations. However, in order to increase our own awareness of how people make sense of incoming information, and to be able to apply such knowledge to our own future interactions, we can identify certain significant trends in cultural behavior. Importantly, such observations are **descriptive** rather than **prescriptive**, which means that we are not saying that one way of acting is better than another.

## 4.2 Our Objectives in This Chapter

As you read through the following section, you may find that analyzing the conversations becomes easier and more obvious. This means that your communicative competence is increasing, and you are beginning to understand how people portray their cultural expectations through their talk. Communicatively competent people learn to watch for certain signs and patterns in how others communicate. Knowing what to look for and what patterns we often find is the first major step in increasing your own intercultural awareness and success.

## 4.3 Cultural Constructs

Certainly you will also notice certain levels of overlap in our categorizations. For example, hierarchy and time approaches tend to be tightly connected, as do other variables such as space, gender, and value assumptions. In order to draw a clear picture of the interactional event, we will try to place most of our focus on one major cultural variable at a time, while other variables will also need referencing. Again, we are working with trends in behavior, not absolutes, but you will hopefully recognize some of these patterns and be able to implement what you have learned into your own future interactions.

### 4.3.1 Time

Many people in Western Europe and North America tend to see time as a linear, consecutively ordered construct. This means that time often consists of segments that follow one after the other and that take a certain logical order (for example, a daily routine). What about you—do you divide your day into specific units? Agendas and detailed schedules can play a very important role for some of us.

Not everyone approaches time this way, however. Some people see time as a much more fluid and changing construct, and something that does not have to follow a specific, predetermined order. One of the major discoveries of the twentieth century was that time is a physical property. Physicists characterize time as varying dependent on


**Fig. 4.1** The importance of managing time in a monochronic culture. (keyorganization.com)

space and gravity factors. Such a view radically altered our understanding of time. No longer must we define time as an unalterable absolute, but rather a dynamic part of our universe interacting with other variables around it. Not surprisingly, then, we find that attitudes about and approaches to time differ from culture to culture (and even from person to person). As mentioned in the previous chapter, intercultural experts such as Hall describe these different approaches as monochronic and polychronic.

Monochronic people often see time as a fixed construct. For monochronics, time is a commodity and can be wasted or exploited. We hear phrases such as "time is money" or "use your time wisely" in cultures that are shaped by such an attitude. **Punctuality** tends to be very important to monochronics. Being late to an appointment can carry a heavy load of moral meaning in many of these cultures. For example, people who come to a meeting late can be characterized as 'unreliable' or even 'undependable' in some cases. Take a look around you—is this true in your own environment as well? In some cases, issues of punctuality also carry various forms of punishment; for example, some universities penalize students who are late to class, companies reprimand workers who consistently come in late, and many organizations fine those who haven't met deadlines. Consider the expectations in your own business organization in terms of contractual agreements, appointments, and even meeting agendas—is time an important part of your own cultural environment? In other words, monochronic culture types view time as a means of organizing their lives, and as an important framework through which they can construct their interaction with one another. Time management seminars are very popular in such cultures, as they teach people how to best prioritize and organize their day according to this perspective (Fig. 4.1).

In some ways, time is considered independent of human behavior and a fixed entity to which we as human must adapt. A monochronic society will typically offer detailed, thorough time management seminars and assistance in an effort to help people learn to prioritize and achieve task lists in an efficient manner. In terms of communication, many monochronics take their conversational turns in a sequential, ordered manner, much like the basic turn patterns we described in the last chapter.

On the other hand, polychronic people view time as a fluid, dynamic entity that does not necessarily have to be the governing framework for all of our behavior. Instead, polychronic people often place a greater emphasis on the outcome or the goal of the action rather than on the timeframe in which it takes place. Turns need not be so strictly structured; in fact we often find variance in turn styles (including overlapping talk, or interruption) in polychronic environments. However, people also display a polychronic approach through different means of communicating, too. For example, a monochronic might see on-time completion of a project as their goal, while the polychronic person is more interested in the internal workings of the project itself. Delays are not serious, and changing the project schedule multiple times is a natural part of the process.

For a polychronic culture, other variables such as hierarchy or social position can take a higher priority than how one's day is organized. This phenomenon of course takes various forms, including not only how people organize their day, but also how they construct and view contracts, logistical systems, etc. We will take a look at a specific example where the two different approaches intersect in the following section.

### 4.3.2 Time and Decision-making

How do people act out their cultural norms and expectations through their talk? Sometimes the approaches to such factors as time and decision-making are quite obvious; other times one has to take apart the details of the interaction to see what has really happened at the micro level of the conversation.

Take a look at the following dialogue. What has happened in this interaction? How do the different parties show their stance or position regarding approaches to time? Can you determine in this short talk how each culture type might make decisions?[1]

**Two men in a negotiation**

Mr. Miller: I'd like to come back to the question of the delivery date again. We seem to have skipped over that one.
Mr. Sato: Yes, this issue is slightly complicated. It will take some thought.
Mr. Miller: Not really. It's just a matter of choosing a date all of us here can agree on.
Mr. Sato: Yes, choosing a date.
Mr. Miller: I think that three months after the start of production is reasonable. What do you think?

[1] Note that even with a short segment of talk, we can often identify issues going on in the interactions. Some might argue that we would need all of the contextual information to make sense of the situation, but that's not necessarily the case. Many times in our conversations we get a sense of the other person's position based on what they say and how they say it.

Mr. Sato: Yes. Three months. Very reasonable. Perhaps we can take a break now.
Mr. Miller: A break? Right now? We only have this one item left and then we'll be finished. If we could just decide.
Mr. Sato: Yes, we need to decide. If we could just have a break.
Mr. Miller: OK. But let's make it quick.

(Adapted from Storti 1994)

Notice that this dialogue represents what we could call a typical **culture clash**: the East-West dichotomy between Mr. Sato and Mr. Miller in this interaction. As we will see, low-contexts differ quite dramatically from high-context cultures in approaches to time, hierarchy, and decision-making approaches.

Miller is from a monochronic, low-context culture, which means that as a rule, he sees time as a linear, consecutive, and ordered event. Miller expects an answer right now—he's working with a direct decision, quick and concrete mentality. In fact, the first thing we notice is his pressured attitude. This "get straight to the point" style fits into the idea of hectic, stringent, Western behavior. Time is money, which means that time schedules are very important to him (therefore, it could seem to him that Sato is wasting time). Miller is used to fast, direct decisions, which creates a tension in the meeting because of Sato's slower style. Sato is Japanese but his behavior could also be correlated with many other Asian cultures, as well. Polychronic, high-context is a good description of Sato from the brief encounter that we have here.

In other words, each participant has different goals and operates in a different decision-making framework, quite normal for each culture type. So Sato is not to be pressured. Asians tend to take more time in making decisions, and there is a consensus-based approach in many Asian societies, so that Sato needs to refer to other colleagues or his boss. This means that Sato may not be able to make the decision on his own, and even admitting this might cause him embarrassment or loss of face.

Let's take a look at Mr. Miller. Right now, you probably see him as the problem—hasty, uninformed, and insensitive to his Asian counterpart. You might be tempted to describe him as pushy or even impolite, as opposed to a more passive Sato. He seems to be ignoring Sato's comments, and decides alone how and when the meeting should proceed.

As far as speech styles, notice how Miller's style is very direct, while Sato is highly indirect. It might be that Miller thinks that Sato is, in fact, agreeing with him, while he really is not, since Asians are often indirect in speech style, and mostly say 'yes' at the outset or on the surface for face saving (politeness) reasons. This is not obvious to Miller. In fact, you might feel that Miller is too unprepared to competently function in this interaction. It certainly comes across that way, doesn't it?

For our purposes, try to step out of the basic pattern you assume and consider this dialogue again: think of **how fast interaction occurs**, and your own intercultural negotiations can just as easily contain short segments which might astonish you if you looked at them in detail. This is why it is so important to be aware of how intercultural communication works!

Expectations differ, of course, and in this case, Miller and Sato's objectives are not clear to one another. Miller wants to finish the deal, and Sato is not ready for

that. In some ways, this is a classical misunderstanding of Western vs. non-Western business practice, so it is not an abnormal event—you might have even experienced an interaction such as this one.

One critical question we ask at this point is who should accommodate to the other person's expectations? Do we assume that Miller should accommodate Sato? What about the other way around—should Sato have known that certain topics need firm answers in some negotiations? It is possible that both are unprepared in terms of having a set agenda of topics agreed upon. Certainly in many cases polychronic cultures approach time differently from monochronic ones. In other words, the **background expectations are different**—Westerners often complete negotiations in a day, while Asians might take several days for the same issue.

We can also say something here related to decision-making and discourse styles: Miller might seem polite but he still pressures Sato for the delivery decision, while Sato is not directly admitting that he cannot give that information right now. In other words, Miller really misses Sato's real message—he doesn't understand this situation because of his own decision-making norms. Quite possibly, Sato needs to refer to a third party (his boss or team) regarding the delivery schedules—here the notion of consensus-oriented decision-making style comes into play.

Sato tries another tactic—taking a break—but Miller misses the point that Sato needs more time to make this decision. For Miller, time means money, so all things should be accomplished in a timely and efficient manner. Taking a break is a waste of time. Once gone, time is unrecoverable for many Westerners.

Notice again Sato's indirect style. Some people might prefer that Sato give a 'straight answer'; that is, he should be more direct. However, in Sato's culture, being direct is of very low social value. Indirectness is highly valued. In fact, he may be being as direct as possible when he says, "Yes, we need to decide. If we could just have a break." Note that indirect speech style is merely another alternative to portraying the same message as direct speech, but with a different 'packaging'. Some cultures or subcultures prefer one style, some prefer the other style. The key is what members from each society **expect**.

In terms of increasing our communicative competence, we are certainly all capable of producing interactions such as this one. Initially, we might tend to think that Miller is unprepared, pushy, or even rude, and often our sympathies are directed to Sato. Is this in itself a myopic way of thinking? What happens when a collision of styles occurs? Here we would argue that awareness is the first step to improving our communicative competence. In other words, your success will in part depend upon your willingness to recognize the problem, and take steps to fix it—even when the other side is either ignorant of the problem or refuses to accommodate you. We shall return to this point later.

### 4.3.3 Time and Turntaking

Let's take another look at time and how cultures approach it differently. When communicating with one another, people have various expectations regarding **information**

**speed** and the form of their messages. For verbal interaction, we often see differences in how speakers formulate their turns, as well as how much information is typically shared (again, here we include the low and high-context distinctions). Watch what happens here:

**Colleagues discussing a recent negotiation**

Nellie: How did the negotiations go?
Michael: Not so well. We were taken.
Nellie: What happened?
Michael: Well, I proposed our starting price, and Maruoka didn't say anything.
Nellie: Nothing?
Michael: He just sat there, looking very serious. So then I brought the price down.
Nellie: And?
Michael: Still nothing. But he looked a little surprised. So I brought it down to our last offer and just waited. I couldn't go any lower.
Nellie: What did he say?
Michael: Well, he was quiet for about a minute, and then he agreed.
Nellie: Well, at least we've got a deal. You should be pleased.
Michael: I guess so. But later I learned that he thought our first price was very generous.

(Adapted from Storti 1994)

Why does Michael feel that the meeting did not go well, even though he made the deal? Again we find the monochronic/polychronic dichotomy, but this time in relation to **turntaking** and the use of **silence**. These two cultural approaches are very different in how they use silence to achieve their objectives. In fact, silence is often viewed in categorically opposing ways in polychronic and monochronic societies. Right at the start we see that Michael has misinterpreted Maruoka's behavior—he reads the silence as a signal of rejection. Michael may be too inexperienced to be able to make sense of Maruoka's discourse style. Many Westerners cannot cope with silence very well, since silence often signals trouble of some kind in the interaction. Here, silence creates what Michael interprets as an 'artificial delay'. Michael gets nervous and begins to make mistakes.

Besides being insecure, Michael feels forced to lower his price because the silence confuses him. This classical example highlights how cultures deal with and accept silence in turns differently, and how many high-context, polychronic cultures use it as a strategy of negotiation style. For Asians, for example, **inserting silence between turns signals respect and honor for a preceding turn**. They tend to highly value silence as a symbol of consideration, as well as seriousness and interest in the ongoing conversation. They often use what we call little "stops" in the conversation (or pauses) for specific purposes, which in this case confuses Michael.

Many low context, monochronic people might have the same reaction as Michael, since we interact in a very fast-moving, 'time is money' world. Normally in

the West, for example, we want to close the deal; that is our priority. Long periods of silence just don't fit into this pattern. Many Westerners might feel nervous, that something is wrong, and that a negative signal has been sent. Therefore, although Michael might be poorly prepared and inexperienced here, his actions can be understood in terms of his expectations: he was simply not used to this turn-taking response. In fact, Michael was probably expecting a lively discussion, not silence. However, Maruoka is only displaying his conversational norm in pausing before answering, and this violates Michael's norms.

Again, we have to ask ourselves who should accommodate who in this interaction? Should Maruoka have known about the typical turn-taking pattern that Michael was expecting? Perhaps he used this inexperience to his advantage, or perhaps he was simply acting out his own norms for interaction. Either way, preparation might have made an enormous difference in the outcome of this negotiation. Michael has lost money, but also face and possibly reputation through this event.

For his part, Maruoka also might have lost something here. In talking to Nellie, Michael describes the interaction as if he had been tricked or deceived into losing profit. Indirectly, he assumes that Maruoka has taken advantage of him in some way, and although he may not be able to articulate exactly what has gone wrong, his relationship with Maruoka could be eroded. Although the deal was made, Michael only recognized late that he has lost money and made a bad deal for his company.

The point here is that our own interactions happen so quickly that we could easily make the same mistakes. There is a sense in which all of these variables or features of our social interaction (such as silence in turn-taking) are universal. That is, these features are used by everyone, in every culture. **The trap is to assume that the meaning of such variables is the same throughout all contexts and cultures**.

### 4.3.4 Space

Another variable where we see cultural patterns in how people behave has to do with the notion of space. Of course there are many non-verbal ways to express our norms regarding space, both personal and professional, but again we will save these for the next chapter, and for the moment look at specifically verbal ways of communicating spatial expectations. Here again the categories of high and low context cultures seem to be a strong factor in determining how much space and social distance holds between parties.

Space is essentially the distance between two parties—not only physically, but also socially or mentally. In fact, we can identify various attitudes towards space, and people tend to differ in what their spatial limits are even within a culture. This means that the understanding of space also is tied into personality and specific contextual factors, such as occasion, setting, gender, and even power. The amount of physical but also social space can take on significance when one party is perceived to be on a higher level of hierarchy. Here's an example of what we mean:

The setting is in a German classroom; the instructor has just asked the students to describe their thoughts on a theory they have been discussing. One of the students responds by asking the instructor for her thoughts. Student 1 is from Israel, and Student 2 is from Germany.

**Social space expectations**

Student 1: (*turning towards the instructor*)
What do you think, Melanie?
Student 2: You can't call her that!
Student 1: Why not? It's her name, isn't it?
Student 2: No. Her name is Dr. Moll.

(Transcripts, Moll 2006)

Here we can see how cultures view the social distance created by a teacher/student relationship setting. For the German student, it is unthinkable to call his instructor by her first name in this setting. In fact, he doesn't even acknowledge her first name as part of her name, stating the doctoral title instead. For the Israeli student, however, calling the instructor by her first name falls well within the range of possible choices. Although they share the notion of space, these two interactants show marked differences in how they apply and interpret the particular situation in which they find themselves. In this setting, the German student expects the classroom to be a setting where the instructor and student hold quite different roles; that is, from his perspective the instructor is the expert and respect is shown by using the instructor's title.

Using the instructor's first name apparently does not signal disrespect from the Israeli student's perspective. In fact, this less formal address might be an attempt at a show of solidarity between the student and her teacher. The social distance between the two is thus somewhat smaller, and this is evident through the actual discourse used.

Another way to describe spatial differences is through our notions of what information belongs in the public or business life, and what information is strictly reserved for our private lives. Have you ever been asked about your personal life during a business appointment? Cultures differ in how much information is made public, and of course the high and low context distinctions apply here, as well as individual or collaborative factors. Low context cultures often categorize certain types of information into distinctly separate categories, while high context cultures display much more overlap among these categories. It is acceptable, in some cultures, to inquire about the health and welfare of the other person's family, even in a business setting. In fact, many Arab cultures will spend quality time building up the personal relationship before they can move to business issues that require mutual trust.

The business of politics is one place we can see the importance of having at least some level of personal relationship across cultures (Fig. 4.2).

What's interesting is that some variation exists even within the high/low context distinction. This means that speakers from one culture type might have various grades or levels of information that they feel fit into the relevant categories, and

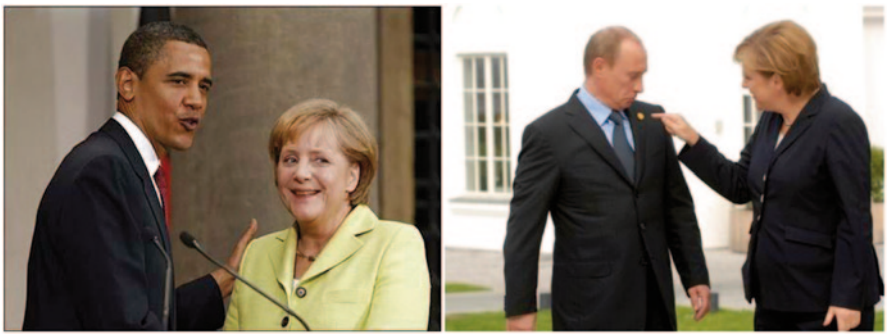


**Fig. 4.2** Building personal relationships. (washingtonpost.com; g-8.de)

these differences can create misunderstandings even within a culture type. For example, a low context culture such as Germany can keep personal family information out of the business arena, but another relatively low context culture such as the United States will often mix family and business affairs. An American woman, speaking to her German counterpart at work, discovered that the German would shortly be celebrating her wedding anniversary. Trying to build a friendly relationship, the American woman targeted this issue:

**Social space and relationships**

Patricia: Oh, that's nice! What day is your anniversary?
Beatrice: Well, Patricia, it's sometime. Sometime.

(Transcripts, Moll 2006)

This short interaction clues us into several assumptions made by these women. First of all, in an effort to create solidarity, the American woman asks what would be a perfectly acceptable question in her cultural environment. Knowing the date of someone's anniversary, for her, does not violate personal privacy norms. On the other hand, the German woman clearly does not want to give this information, and counters with a vague 'sometime'. In short, discussing a wedding anniversary might cross over the line into private information which she does not feel is appropriate to talk about in the workplace setting. From the American's point of view, the German response could be seen as an affront or even a rude reply. But the question itself, from the German perspective, could be seen as invasive and therefore rude. Within seconds, our participants might build an invisible social wall between themselves simply by misunderstanding the intent of the other. What we see here is that cultures, even of the same general type, display degrees of acceptance of familiarity and spatial boundaries.

Money is another tricky topic that intercultural interactions can find difficult to navigate. Consider, for example, the following short interaction between two colleagues that have met at one of their apartments:

**Social space and money**

Antonio: Wow—this is a beautiful apartment.
Frank: Thanks.
Antonio: What do you pay for this place?
Frank: Why—do you want to pay my rent?

(Transcripts, Moll 2006)

Antonio evidently sees no problem with asking about personal financial information, but clearly Frank is from a culture type where the private financial sphere stays just that—private. Frank is not about to disclose his rent amount to his colleague Antonio, and the slightly sarcastic response displays his stance towards Antonio's question. In many high context cultures, discussing money issues or knowing one another's income is rather common. A low context culture type will many times show much more reserve when it comes to personal finances. Again this can depend in part on personality types, but we argue that personalities are themselves partly shaped by one's cultural surroundings.

What people perceive as their spatial boundaries can thus include certain topics as well as simply physical space. When our expectations of where the boundaries are happen to be violated, conflict often occurs, and this can happen without the speaker even knowing it. Space issues can also include factors such as smells, physical touch, and proximity, but we will examine these variables in the next chapter.

Perhaps less obvious is the way in which we perceive our social distance vis-à-vis one another. In fact, when someone feels that their social distance has been infringed upon, we can also observe a conflict of cultural space norms through communication patterns. For example, consider the following dialogue:

**Setting appointments**

Ms. Dortmund: Matsumoto-san. Good to see you again.
Mr. Matsumoto: Thank you.
Ms. Dortmund: How are things?
Mr. Matsumoto: Good, thank you. I came to tell you that our new vice president for distribution is coming in next week.
Ms. Dortmund: Oh good. Was he expected?
Mr. Matsumoto: We just heard yesterday. We're setting up appointments for him with all our suppliers and he'd like to see you, if you have any free time, of course. We'd like you to come on Wednesday at 9:00.
Ms. Dortmund: Let me check my calendar. We have our regular staff meeting on Wednesday mornings, but I'm sure I can change that. Let me just check and get back to you later this morning.
Mr. Matsumoto: I'm sorry for the trouble.
Ms. Dortmund: Not at all.

(Adapted from Storti 1994)

It is easy to see how this dialogue could be analyzed with regard to our variable of time. Many low-context people such as Dortmund have a close relationship to their schedules; what this means is that they see a schedule as a structure into which they can plug people, as we noted above. Reliability and planning is of high value in a culture like Germany, so Dortmund could be someone who prefers lead time and organized information—are you like this? For monochronics, canceling meetings at short notice can sometimes be a problem or an embarrassment.

It might seem on the surface that there is no trouble in this dialogue, and that Dortmund is being flexible by offering to check into her schedule. However, there are other factors at work in this interaction. Peeling back the layers, you might notice that there is a subtle power struggle going on here. Matsumoto clearly expects Dortmund to cancel her meeting and to accept the meeting with the VP. High context and polychronic cultures see people as something around which one arranges schedules, which contrasts with a low context perspective. In other words, what weekly meeting could be more important than the boss coming to town? When the VP comes to town, schedules get changed, and Matsumoto expects that Dortmund will see this visit as an honor, since hierarchy plays such an enormous role in his culture type.

But Dortmund doesn't agree immediately. Her reaction shows Matsumoto that there is trouble. She says she'll need to check her calendar (this could be very condescending to some people, since it puts the power firmly in the position of the one holding the calendar) and perhaps it confuses Matsumoto. Perhaps Dortmund is wanting more time so that she can be better prepared for the meeting, but it seems as if she is presented with a polite, but indirect order. Therefore she might feel that she has no choice in the matter—somewhat of a paradox. Matsumoto has already planned and set the meeting before even asking her. In this case, Dortmund's social distance has been infringed upon by Matsumoto setting the meeting a priori. She doesn't immediately agree to it—perhaps to show how busy she is, or perhaps to maintain some semblance of control of her own schedule.

Thus, we can see evidence of spatial (in this case, social distance) expectations being violated in this short interaction. Again, people tend to talk out their norms in their communication and discourse styles, and this gives us evidence of how people make sense of the world around them. Note Matsumoto's statement 'If you have time, of course'. But he has already assumed she will make the time since he has preplanned the meeting and her attendance. What if someone changed your schedule before telling you—would that bother you?

Clearly, the notion of culturally different approaches to space includes not only physical, but also socially-determined power distances. Violating people's expectations of where these power boundaries lie can cause serious misunderstandings, and create friction in the interaction. Because cultures view factors such as hierarchy, schedules, and priorities differently, it is important that we remain aware and alert to such possibilities.

### 4.3.5 Value Orientations

One of the most complicated areas to analyze is how people see the world around them in terms of values, ethics, and morality. It is impossible to present a complete picture of what goes on inside people's heads, but through people's communication patterns we can say something about their **value orientations**; that is, how they make sense of ongoing human interaction and what they assume is morally or ethically acceptable in their world. Specifically here we shall examine the notion of how people portray events going on around them, including not just their own actions, but also the consequences of these. That is, whether a person takes responsibility for some action is often a matter of the cultural context they have experienced. We shall also look at the concepts of gender and religion, and how we can display our position and worldview through our choices in and use of language.

This is not a discussion about the existence of absolute truth. Instead, here we are examining ways in which cultures differ in how they see certain issues, or approach various ethical or moral problems. For simplicity's sake, we will use the term truth; however, what we mean is **how different people perceive an issue to be true or not**. Just as we can define people's expectations on time and space through their talk, we also find evidence of human stance towards important personal constructs such as religion, secular interests, decision-making, and presentation of self or status in society. Whether and how a society defines lying can vary from one cultural context to another. The notion of what constitutes 'right' and what constitutes 'wrong' behavior is also included in value orientations—that is, whether different people see a behavior as right or as wrong within their own cultural environment.

In the business world, such perception can be critical to the development of the relationship, project, or deal. Here again we note that the metaculture plays a certain, but not exclusive role in how corporations and individuals see themselves vis-à-vis the context. In other words, there are some global business expectations, and often international law will apply in such situations. But there are times when the agency of an event is not governed by explicit laws, and where personal perception takes over.

One observation that we can make at the outset is that the individual vs. group paradigm seems to play an important role in how people organize and act out their values. In fact, cultures that tend to be more individualistic in nature often differ dramatically in their definition of morally 'good' or ethical behavior than do more collaborative cultures. Specifically in the business world, the ethical responsibility of a company vis-à-vis its employees can be quite different in the fast-paced, hire and fire individually-driven cultures when compared to more collaborative, family-oriented cultures that see employment as a long-term relationship. In other words, what constitutes what people see as 'good' or 'bad' social behavior can differ dramatically from culture to culture (and at times even within subcultures).

To illustrate this rather complex phenomenon, consider the following simplified example. Obviously, people have different expectations about the levels of politeness required in ongoing interaction. Of course, one's situational context will also play a strong role here, since we have unspoken 'rules' about how to talk to strangers or to those in authority, etc. In general, however, there are certain trends that we seem to

expect in our interactions. Others might hold different expectations, and when our norms clash, often we see evidence of communication breakdown or a barrier in the relationship. For example, many western societies will place a heavy emphasis on the politeness terms 'please' and 'thank-you'. These are taught to children at a relatively early age in the expectation that they will use the terms. A communicatively competent child is expected to know this, so much so that if he or she omits a please or thank-you, many times the adult will prompt the child accordingly ('What do you say?').

These expectations don't hold globally, however. Here's an example of what this means. Macedonians are taught to say 'yes' or 'no' directly and without the politeness terms. In fact, in some parts of Macedonia, saying 'no thank-you' would mean that what is offered is somehow unacceptable, or that the speaker doesn't like it. Clearly misunderstandings could occur when a speaker who is not aware of this norm uses the polite terms in their interaction. The Macedonian could be offended, although the unaware speaker is simply making an attempt to be polite. From the other perspective, not using the polite speech in some cultural contexts might communicate rude or impolite behavior. So obviously the situation can take on a very complex character, and part of intercultural communicative competence is learning these subtle distinctions.

Within business interactions, we find that people's notion of good behavior is obvious through their communication. As we have seen, interpersonal agreement and collaboration are very important for some cultural contexts. In fact, such actions are more significant than other factors. For example, consider the following conversation between Paul and Susanne. Both are part of a German automotive project team working through the details of a supplier contract in England. Their English counterpart, Charles, has just sent an email to Paul.

**Mixed messages**

| | |
|---|---|
| Paul: | This is so frustrating! |
| Susanne: | What happened in your meeting with Charles? |
| Paul: | I thought that we had reached an understanding, but apparently not. During the meeting he seemed to agree with our proposal, but now he writes that we need to redefine and clarify some important points. Why didn't he say that in the meeting? |
| Susanne: | Perhaps he was trying to be helpful. |
| Paul: | Helpful? I don't need helpful, I need to know what he really thinks! |

(Transcripts, Moll 2006)

Here we can see that Paul and Charles have different understandings of correct behavior in negotiations. While Charles' culture places a strong emphasis on collaboration, agreement, and politeness, Paul's culture type values completing tasks efficiently and timely. What to Charles seems appropriate and polite communication is to Paul unnecessary and misleading, and creates a feeling of frustration and distrust. In other words, because of their diverging approaches, one or both of these interactants end up dissatisfied with the negotiation.

### 4.3.6 Truth Orientations

What is truth? A literary and philosophical question, to be sure, but nonetheless relevant for our discussion of human interactional behavior. The fact that we can ask that question presupposes some difficulties with defining truth. In most discussions, the notion of whether something is truthful or not takes on a question of morality. Being truthful is often described as a virtue, whereas not telling the truth is wrong (or even considered a sin). While these distinctions tend to hold globally, **they are not necessarily acted out uniformly**. One of the most obvious examples of this phenomenon is in how people use direct or indirect speech styles.

Let's take a closer look at an example of this. If a person from a highly direct style culture type feels cold, he or she might say something like this:

- Please shut the window because I am cold.

However, not all cultures would phrase things this way. People who are used to more indirect styles might phrase their request as a hint:

- Are you cold?/Does it seem cold in here to you?

These are rather simple examples that might seem, on the surface, to be only stylistically different. But here is the twist: what happens when the topic is more face-threatening, such as when it involves an evaluation of someone's performance, is that **we see a more obvious difference in the styles and possibly their interpretations**. For example, a team leader may be trying to communicate to one of her team members that he or she needs to show up to work on time, and not 10 min late. A person using a direct style might hit the issue head on:

- This policy is absolute. You must be at work precisely at 8 o'clock. No exceptions, otherwise there will be consequences.

Interestingly, most people from indirect style culture types would never or rarely phrase their guidance this way. Instead, a more collaborative, inclusive, and question (rather than blunt statement) approach would be used:

- Let's try to get to work by 8 o'clock. It's really important for the whole team that we begin together.

The message is arguably the same, but the packaging of this message differs dramatically based on what people are used to and expecting in terms of speech style. Notice that the direct speech style doesn't contain many 'softeners' or inclusive statements. The responsibility (and hence the agency) rests mostly on the employee being spoken to. On the other hand, in a collaborative or indirect style, agency is often spread to a group. The effect is to reduce the 'harshness' on the hearer, and can often include questions or hints as well.

Obviously, if you are highly direct and come from a culture that supports a direct style, the second example can seem like nonsense to you. In fact, you might even feel rather annoyed that the speaker is not coming directly to the point, and is spreading the responsibility around to the group even if it only applies to one member. This phenomenon often causes individuals to label indirect style as less 'honest' or less truthful. The trap here is for us to assume that everyone operates the same way that we do, especially when it comes to speech styles. The indirect speaker, on the other hand, would often feel that the first example is rude and pushy, and far too face-threatening. Here the danger is that the direct approach is seen as offensive and most likely even personal.

What happens when these speech styles collide? Communication breaks down, and people get upset. One side feels offended, the other side is annoyed at the trivial nature of the whole thing. Unfortunately, situations like this one are very common in intercultural interactions, so that we often build invisible barriers in just a few seconds of talk. The business relationship becomes strained, and many people don't even realize what has happened.

Let's suppose an acquaintance of yours has opened a new restaurant, and invites you to visit for a meal. The food is mediocre, and the service is also lacking somewhat. Your acquaintance comes over to the table at the end of the meal and asks you what your impressions are of the restaurant. What will you say? How you formulate your answer will often tell a lot about which communication style you use.

### 4.3.7 Agency: Using Language to Determine Responsibility

There are times when speakers will work and rework their talk to shape how others see them and their responsibilities. Agency means social action, or responsibility for something, simply put. Implied in the 'human capacity to act' (Ahearn 2001, 2011) is the notion of an agent: 'the willful initiator of an event that is depicted as having consequences for either an object or animate patient' (Duranti 1994: 125). When we look at intercultural talk, you can be sure that we will find instances of shaping meaning for that talk event. What this means is that speakers can use their talk to portray or deflect responsibility based on their own perception of the situation. In ways very similar to making requests, speakers use communication styles to get others to do something for them, to take responsibility for something, and especially to avoid taking direct responsibility.

Fulfilling or avoiding agency can be a very tricky matter, and often highly specific to culture type. Duranti, for example, shows that in Samoan culture, speakers use self and other abasement types of expressions, rather than directly focusing on one person. They also tend to place more emphasis on the object or task than on the actual doer. In this way, their culture uses indirect communication structures to deal with potentially face-threatening situations. Israeli culture, on the other hand, tends to be much more direct in communication style when fulfilling or assigning agency. Germans, too, will be more likely to assign agency or ask for requests directly, and since it is somewhat expected in their culture, the chances of offence are much lower.

**Fig. 4.3** Roundtable discussions create an impression of a group-based culture. (isc-austin.org)

In English, our lingua franca, taking or avoiding responsibility is often done through roles and pronoun choices. The role of **agent** implies the person doing the action, whereas other human roles, such as experiencer or benefactor often symbolize receiving the action in some way. English pronouns can offer speakers a variety of ways to individualize or distribute agency. For example, the first, second, and third person singular pronouns generally index an individual or direct focus:

a) One thing **I** am going to try to do is…
b) **You** did not finish your work.
c) Why didn't **she** come to the meeting?

In contrast, English plural pronouns (for example 'we' or 'us') often are used to deflect direct agency, and create a more collaborative or inclusive picture that focuses only indirectly on the agent:

a) **We** need to get to work a little bit earlier.
b) **Let's** try to get this done by tomorrow.
c) **We** want to make sure **our** workstations are orderly.

Using 'we' or 'let's' to assign agency in potentially face-threatening talk allows us to avoid those direct or possibly confrontative interactions. By integrating one another into the interaction, we can thus create a focus on the mutual, reflexive benefits of acting in sync, and **the hearer is put into a position that is tightly tied to the group**. This is very important for cultures that have a strong group focus, and avoid singling out individuals. Just as a roundtable discussion creates the impression of equality in group dynamics, so using first person plural pronouns creates the same effect through discourse (Fig. 4.3).

The following is a real example of this phenomenon. During the early 1990s, the BMW automaker built an important assembly plant in South Carolina, USA. The effects of the new plant were enormous on the social infrastructure of the area,

and brought in waves of cultural influence. For example, some of the automaker's suppliers, originally located in Germany, also relocated divisions to South Carolina to service the assembly plant. This meant that several cultures came together in one geographical location with the goal of close collaboration and interaction. Since the participants all used English in their interactions, it is relatively easy to compare the different participants' communicative development regarding certain social practices such as issuing directives, requests, or assigning agency.

During one such supplier meeting, we can see the actual transformation of individual to collaborative agency right within the turn. In this meeting, three US members of BMW, one German member of Draexlmaier Automotive of America, and a French member of Sommer Allibert discuss shipments of high performance (HP) leather parts designed for the BMW M-roadster. A critical aspect of these meetings is the fact that the companies have forged a tightly knit, collaborative context in which they operate. Since they all operate with a just-in-time delivery system, they are dependent upon one another for good cooperation. What normally might have been highly direct cultures individually have thus created a group culture that works well with an indirect, collaborative communication style.

Here we can actually see in the communicative turns the speakers' attempts at successfully using such a style. The German member initiates a turn, but quickly repairs his talk to rephrase what he wants.[2]

**Supplier Meetings**

Markus 1 Okay now what I'm going to try to do,
2 I would like to be able to do,
3 see if you guys would do this.
4 could you give us say one to two extra HP's a day,
5 and work this thing down, so we can get back to the sequence?

(Transcripts, Moll 2000)

In his turn, Markus begins his turn with an assertion of what he wants ('what I'm going to try to do'). But then he rephrases his talk less as a direct statement and more as a wish or preference for what is to come. After this, he switches the emphasis from himself to the group ('you guys'). Notice that Markus has not yet clarified what he wants at this point; rather he has restarted and repaired his talk three times, each time moving towards a more collaborative or inclusive group stance. Then, finally in lines 4 and 5, he makes his request known:

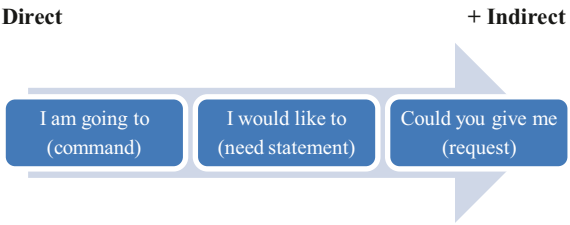
4 could you give us say one to two extra HP's a day,
5 and work this thing down, so we can get back to the sequence?

In effect, this speaker has extensively repaired his initial utterance until it looks quite different from when he started. Furthermore, he also adds an appeal to getting

[2] For the purpose of our analysis, here we number each line of every speaker's turn.

back to the sequence that is presumably in everyone's interest to follow. What had started out as a rather individual-focused, direct statement has now become a context of working together for mutual benefit. The effect is that Markus has successfully taken the agency of responsibility away from a single player in this interaction, and rather spread it to the group as a whole.

If we reconsider the scale of directness that we looked at in Chap. 3, we can actually see a transformation in Markus' talk **within only one turn**!




Therefore, what we can see from this single turn is that **speakers can use the language strategically to adapt to the cultural expectations of the group**. In this case, an emphasis on pronouns has helped this speaker transform his request. Markus is becoming more communicatively competent, because he has recognized that packaging his message in different ways will lead to different results.

In the next meeting, which is centered on solving production and delivery problems, we again see how speakers learn to be communicatively competent in business issues. What is interesting in this interaction is again to see the **cultural adaptation** that the members have made to the group-based, collaborative atmosphere built by these suppliers. Although their individual native cultures might tend to various levels of directness, the group as a whole has embraced the notion of the collaborative, mutually-dependent context, and what we see in the actual talk is evidence of this attitude. In other words, whereas normally participants might be more direct in their native cultures, here they at least try to adapt to a less face-threatening, more indirect style. The question for the speaker, of course, is if this style is effective.

The parties in this particular include the same companies as above, but this time neither BMW nor Sommer Allibert have arrived at the meeting yet. The members of Draexlmaier Automotive of America (representing German, American and Indian cultures) are discussing training production workers for new parts production. One of the German participants is Stefan, who is the production manager. He begins by voicing his view of the problem, which he feels is a lack of internal organization within his own company, Draexlmaier:

**Supplier Meetings**

Stefan 1 I know for the next weeks or what's going to be starting
2 we need to have everything in place a little bit earlier.
3 Especially the training and the equipment should be
4 settled up in the trainings area…

5 I hope it's gonna be even earlier to set up and umm
6 instead always miss, you know,
7 distraction, control demands, and the whole idea is not
8 through the different departments,
9 just somehow it starts right here and stops right there.
10 I think we would have to make it better for the next run.

To this his colleague Bernd, who is responsible for the logistics planning, responds:

Bernd 11 I mean it's umm, from my point of view it's—
12 we discussed it already briefly.
13 It's not only our internal problem.
14 Sure we have leaks of information,
15 umm, codes, drawing dates,
16 what we have to accomplish when.
17 But I also have the feeling that, you know,
18 the information we get from customers —
19 like Allibert, BMW, we just don't get anything.
20 And if we don't get anything, we need to raise blank,
21 you know, we cannot do anything without any datas.

(Transcripts, Moll 2000)

Let's take a closer look at what is actually happening in this short dialogue. Stefan, in line 3, suggests that his own company needs to try to get all their systems in order and operating before the next production run, especially regarding the specifications of particular parts. By starting out in line 2 using 'we' he targets the whole group as responsible, which of course rings consistent with his general call to have 'everything in place'. But there is a slight hitch—clearly there is something which is bothering him about the whole process. The interesting unfolding of his talk, however, and the real focus of his complaint emerges a little later in lines 7–9:

Stefan 7 distraction, control demands, and the whole idea is not
8 through the different departments,
9 just somehow it starts right here and stops right there.

Here Stefan shows that he is dissatisfied with the way that information is being processed through the various departments of his company. In essence, he is saying that some departments are not performing up to snuff. Although his complaint seems to be vaguely lodged against 'different departments' or the group in general, one clue from Stefan's turn suggests specifically who he is targeting here. In the beginning of his turn, he makes a remark about equipment:

Stefan 1 I know for the next weeks or what's going to be starting
2 we need to have everything in place a little bit earlier.

3 Especially the training and the equipment should be
4 settled up in the trainings area…

Stefan is responsible for the actual production process of various supplier parts. What he is not responsible for is hiring and training the workers, nor for the purchase and set up of the training equipment. Rather, Bernd, the logistics manager, is required to arrange installation of such training equipment.

Here we see that even though Stefan frames his accusation in a way which generally targets everyone present ('all different departments') he nevertheless embeds his true target within the generality of his comments. **In so doing, he can voice his complaint and at the same time use a strategy of indirectness fitting to the cultural context that includes the whole group**.

In discussing negotiations that take place in our workplaces, Rosalie Tung writes, 'people are contingently sensitive to who they relevantly are, where they are, what they are attempting to do, and what is expected of them (1988:27). Stefan, therefore, can be relatively sure that his indirect, group-based message of responsibility will be received by the person he is targeting.

As a matter of fact, Stefan's strategy is successful. Following Stefan's turn, Bernd immediately responds. He begins his turn with a focus on himself and his own 'point of view' but this is quickly repaired in line 2 to a more inclusive pronoun usage 'we'. From that point on, Bernd includes the whole group in his response as well, which helps him to deflect the implicit accusation that the training for the equipment is not well handled. In other words, instead of it being simply his fault, suddenly the entire group is brought into the conversation, and in fact he suggests that the whole group is not getting enough information to be well-prepared. In fact, in this way Bernd can even redefine the events using the same collaborative framework (focus on the group instead of the individual) that Stefan had used in his turn.

In the business world, we are often taking or deflecting responsibility for some action. In this example, we can see how people assign agency and thus express their attitudes towards events right in the turns that they take. What makes this example especially interesting is that both Stefan and Bernd come from Germany, a culture that tends to be highly individualistic; that is, the focus of achievement often is on the individual person, rather than the whole group. What happens here is that we can see, through their discourse turns, that both of them have developed enough communicative competence to be (consciously or subconsciously) aware that the expected norm in their current surroundings is a collaborative, group-oriented one. In this case, both of them have chosen to adapt to the new norm, even though we can still see traces of the old norms in their talk!

### 4.3.8 The Gender Factor

Direct and indirect styles are very obvious ways to present our notions of values and what constitutes our version of reality. There are, of course, other ways

that our expectations of behavior are visible through discourse. For example, how people see gender and how they attribute various social roles to women is evident throughout language. Many social scientists have suggested that language shows a definite bias when it comes to women. Let's consider our lingua franca—English, for example. When someone talks of an astronaut, do we automatically think of a man? What about a president, or a chemistry professor? How do you react when you hear these terms—is it a natural process for you to think of women in these roles?[3]

In some cultures, women are not allowed to take advantage of educational advantages and therefore they are limited to certain types of careers. For these women, their roles mostly consist of housework and taking care of children, and they may or may not have any access to a social network outside their home environment. Because being a mother is not a negative trait, however, there are many women that find this path very positive and self-fulfilling. But in certain cultures, women are not considered as an equal member of society to men, and therefore they don't have the choice of career that men in that society do. This characterization extends beyond cultural borders, of course, and often can be linked to certain personality types as well (for example, a dominant spouse). Overall, however, the cultural context will either support or repress a woman in making her own choices regarding her life and career.

Often in the West we tend to think ourselves past this human communication barrier, especially in the business world. But is that really so? Consider, for example, our tendencies to associate a gender with a certain word choice.

> At the grossest level, **gender-biased language** implies that people are male unless 'proven' to be female. Female gender may be designated by either tagging on a feminine descriptor (e.g. lady professor, women doctor, female engineer) or by belonging to a stereotypically female group (e.g., kindergarten teacher, social worker). (Ruscher 2001)

Since language can be a powerful medium through which we see and understand our world, choosing certain words over others can make an enormous difference in how we display our values regarding gender and the equality of humanity. Of course, this process will differ from culture to culture, since as we noted above there are differences in how the language grammatically treats issues such as gender, hierarchy, etc. While some languages use specific grammatical functions or endings to distinguish between genders (i.e., Lehrer, Lehrerin), one development in some languages (especially in English) is the creation of what is called **politically correct terminology** that seeks to equalize language biased towards or against gender, ethnicity, social class standing, etc. Such vocabulary at least provides speakers with choices as to how they will portray and define their world and the social context around them. The following list illustrates some of these choices:

[3] Many languages use grammatical markers to denote gender. Here we are not arguing that the grammar by itself carries gender attitudes, although in some cases that could be possible.

| Terminology with a gender bias | Politically correct terminology |
|---|---|
| Guys (when referring to a mixed group) | Friends; folks; group |
| Ladies | Women |
| Waitress | Server |
| Policemen/postman | Police officer/mail carrier |
| Steward/stewardess | Flight attendant |
| Chairman | Chair |
| Secretary | Personal Assistant |
| Nurse | Nurse practitioner |

Of course, there are many examples throughout language where a person's **values** regarding gender are evident. What is important for us to remember here is that a speaker's communicative competence will in part depend upon their ability to use non-biased forms when appropriate or required. The **culturally aware person** tends to make these sorts of distinctions, whereas cultural ignorance can often lead to misunderstandings or offense:

Age adds a further dimension to the gender complexities. Historically, even in the West, many societies offered limited categories for women in the workplace, and these attitudes can still be noticed generationally. For example, an older German consultant for an automobile manufacturer visited a production plant in the United States. When he was introduced to a woman manager who ran several divisions of the assembly line at the plan, he immediately assumed that she was a personal secretary to a male manager. His assumption caused both a misunderstanding and a temporary rift in the relationship between the consultant and the manager.

Obviously, we all tend to make assumptions about the world around us. The critical point to remember is that our assumptions might be based on the social reality that we inherit from our own cultural surroundings. Cultures that maintain distinct gender roles often carry these attitudes into the workplace in rather noticeable ways. Here is an example of what we mean:

> A joint-venture meeting was just about to get underway. Participants included two men from Cameroon, two from Egyptian, and a French man and French woman. The six participants took their seats around the discussion table. At that moment, someone asked who would be taking the meeting minutes. Both Cameron participants and one Egyptian turned towards the French woman. She avoided their glances by focusing her attention on the files in front of her. As one of them called out her name, she fixed a steely gaze upon him and replied that she would be busy entering logistics data into her organization's timeline. Finally, the other Egyptian suggested that they call in another secretary.

This sort of example can tell us a great deal about cultural assumptions. First of all, taking meeting minutes is not a task that necessarily defaults to women. But in cultural environments where gender roles are distinct and categorized, women many times fall into various service or assistance categories. In this case, it seemed natural to the men from Cameroon and at least one Egyptian that the woman should be taking their meeting minutes.

Second of all, her refusal to assume the role of note taker prompted the other Egyptian to call for 'another' secretary. Here the word 'another' identifies his position as well, since it indirectly defines the French woman as a secretary.

Lastly, her response also shows a clear understanding of the situation and the roles that are being assigned in this interaction. By avoiding their initial glances, she sets her position as a non-participant to this part of the conversation. Once her name is called, her body language as well as her verbal response portrays just how she feels about being assigned to what she sees as a secretarial job. Notice that she does not directly refuse to take the minutes, but rather refers to her actual assigned task in this meeting, which she obviously sees as more important.

Because the metacultural layer of globalized norms can seem so obvious in some cultures, often members of these areas overlook the deeper and important cultural patterns that might be lurking beneath the surface of behavior. One logistics manager described her experiences as she led a negotiating team into Pakistan. She was initially ignored completely, and then interrupted repeatedly when she tried to talk. Her counterparts would not look at her, but rather at her male colleagues during the negotiations. While this treatment infuriated her, she eventually realized that it was an embedded cultural pattern, and not directed at her personally. During the second day of negotiations, she asked her one of her colleagues to take over most of the negotiating role and the interactional climate improved.[4]

### 4.3.9 Assumptions of Religion

Religious assumptions are all around us. What people expect or think regarding religious trends, holidays, rituals, and beliefs is evident in their talk. For example, consider the following dialogue between two colleagues before the plant's end-of-year shut-down:

**Seasonal Greetings**

Jenny See you in January, Anna, and have a Merry Christmas!
Anna Thanks, Jenny, but I am Jewish. We don't celebrate Christmas.

(Transcripts, Moll 2006)

Here we can clearly see that Jenny's automatic assumption is that those around her share her traditions and rituals, including the religious holiday of Christmas. While this example probably demonstrates a friendly interaction, other examples can lead to more severe consequences, such as offering Muslims food during Ramadan, or not properly respecting certain Buddhist rituals.

The point here is that while we are in a business environment, we are still very much tied to the personal relationships around us, and these in turn are directly influenced by our cultural assumptions and expectations. Just because we live in

[4] Personal communication to the author.

a globalized world does not mean that all of our interactions will proceed within a one-dimensional framework, namely, that of the metaculture. In fact, many times we find that our business interactions are less successful than we had hoped, or that invisible barriers seem to have been built between us and our business counterparts. Therefore the ability to recognize such developments will go a long way towards improving our own intercultural communicative competence.

The repression of religious worship is one of the more evident verbal communications regarding our values and what we see as appropriate. The continual conflict between Marxist guerillas and the Catholic Church in Latin America, or the tightly controlled expression of religion in North Korea are examples of this more extreme form of imposing one's value expectations on another (Bandow 2009).

When it comes to current religious tensions in our globalized world, one prominent example of verbal stance occurs in the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. Here we can see that words play an enormous role in how we structure our values. The notion of 'settlement' or what constitutes land ownership is tightly tied to the rhetoric of the dueling parties. Whether a journalist chooses to describe violent actions as those of 'terrorists', 'resistance,' or 'freedom fighters' give us clues as to her or his political orientation. Public statements such as 'wipe out a land' or that a particular culture is a 'cancer' to the rest of the world clearly demonstrate both the implicit as well as explicit values of the speaker.

Certain religious and moral positions can be communicated more subtly, however. Forch, Switzerland, hosts a physician-assisted suicide facility. For many Swiss, the values for what they see as humanitarianism and compassion outweigh other moral issues such as the sanctity of human life. The name of this facility, *Dignitas*, communicates their emphasis on the quality of life, rather than simply the ability to be alive (for a more thorough discussion of the conflict of values here, see Lewy 2010).

## 4.4 Summary

Clearly, our verbal communication displays our understanding of events, our expectations of values, and how we make sense of the world around us. How a person structures his or her talk can often tell a great deal about their stance vis-à-vis those around them, as well as those in contexts they may be less familiar with. Whether in relation to how people see and prioritize time, how comfortable they feel about the space usage around them, or how they live out their values is evident through verbal interactions.

In this chapter, we have taken a more detailed look at the role of language in how people show their stance and attitude towards events going on around them. When values and expectations collide, the possibility of conflict and/or damage to the relationship occurs. What is important for you as an intercultural person is to be aware of the many differences in norms. Such awareness will help us avoid making unnecessary assumptions and basing all of our interactions on our own expectations. The culturally competent speaker realizes that successful interactions stem from a careful and informed preparation when dealing with the target culture.

# Non-verbal Communication in Action

# 5

## 5.1 Introduction

When Michelle Obama met Silvio Berlusconi for the first time, the two warmly embraced with two kisses on the cheek. Later, Berlusconi was quoted in the press as having described Barack Obama as having 'a great tan'. The next time Michelle Obama and Berlusconi met, he leaned forward to embrace her, but she extended her hand for a more distanced handshake. Was meaning communicated? Absolutely. Her body language clearly displayed the social distance that she wanted to put between herself and Berlusconi.

In the previous chapters we looked at interaction and how people verbally communicate their cultural expectations and norms with one another. We noted the level of what we called metaculture, which is a shared set of behaviors globally. The metaculture, we said, is that apparent surface level of culture that is globally recognizable, including common practices such as international traveling standards, international law, media representations, economic practices, and politics. However, a good deal of culturally-specific behavior lies underneath the metaculture, and being able to understand this less obvious behavior is a major influencing factor in how successful our own intercultural interactions are.

Of course, not all communication is limited to verbal interaction. A lot of what we communicate to others is done without talk, so we will now turn our attention to how people portray their attitudes through various non-verbal means. In no way can this be an exhaustive study, since the kaleidoscope of human behavior is so varied. However, we will try to highlight some of the main non-verbal communication types that you will encounter within your own business interactions.

M. Moll, *The Quintessence of Intercultural Business Communication,*
Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_5,

## 5.2 Defining Non-verbal Communication

Essentially, we human beings spend our lives communicating with one another. We communicate a great deal through talk, and face-to-face interaction plays an enormous role in our lives. However, a lot of meaning can be transferred through other channels. For example, body language can and does matter greatly in certain contexts and societies. A smile, a simple wave, or even a steady eye contact, all carry very different messages in different cultures. Most of us know the Asian practice of carefully scrutinizing the business card as a sign of respect and honour. To simply put the card away would signify disinterest and disrespect. Or perhaps you are familiar with the practice of not extending a left hand in certain Arab cultures, since the left hand is associated with dirt or uncleanliness. Body language is one way of non-verbally communicating conscious or unconscious meaning to another person.

Of course, not all non-verbal communication is found only in body language. Cultures and their societies can communicate a great deal of information regarding their stance and position on certain issues and topics. For example, how a culture chooses to educate its members tells much about the value of the individual in that culture. How members of a culture make decisions, whether in groups or as individuals, can display whether a culture tends towards the high or the low context paradigm. Advertising norms, and what is ethically permissible in the media also carries meaning about how that culture approaches various moral questions. Morality itself is defined with some differences in different contexts. Even our attitudes about the physical world around us can be communicated. It is said that Mahatma Gandhi claimed that greatness of a country could be measured in how it treated its animals.

So how should we define non-verbal communication? Decisions, values, hierarchy, gender, and body language are merely samples of how people communicate non-verbally. Here we will make the very general statement that **non-verbal communication is simply communicating meaning without using overt language or talk**.

In this chapter we will try to define some of the main areas of non-verbal communication which we encounter in our intercultural lives. Obviously, it is impossible to locate and describe every single type of culturally-specific non-verbal communication. Instead, we will give some of the more prominent examples, along with sample analyses and discussion, which you can then apply to your own interactions. No doubt you already have or will encounter many other examples, and these experiences should help to heighten your awareness of how similar variables or practices are used differently in different cultural contexts.

### 5.2.1 Non-verbal Communication is as Meaningful as Verbal Communication

One point which cannot be overlooked is the level of meaning that non-verbal communication carries with it. In fact, we would argue that non-verbal is just as meaningful as verbal communication, and that some people and cultures depend on it to transmit their ideas at least as much as they do verbal forms.

Personal space preference is highly culturally-determined and can pose unique problems when interacting in a different culture. For example, in Germany, generally one arm's length is acceptable as a distance between two people for a casual interaction. It is normally not acceptable to stand intimately close to a stranger, and many people will shift or continue backing up if someone violates this expectation. This behavior holds especially in the workplace, where a gap between private and business life still exists. In Columbia, South America, however, close contact is normal, even among working colleagues. Men and women both have lower personal distance requirements and frequently engage in personal contact, casual touch, and even hugging. For someone who is not used to contact among colleagues, such behavior can be both surprising as well as offensive. Both cultures express clearly their individualistic or collaborative cultural approaches through this sort of non-verbal interaction, and the meaning that it carries is just as evident as if it were carried through the spoken word.[1]

### 5.2.2 Non-verbal Communication is Organized

Just as we noted with verbal communication, non-verbal forms are organized. In fact, we can identify trends among people by carefully observing their non-verbal actions. Let's look at a specific example of this. When it comes to turn taking, some non-verbal elements can constitute a person's turn. So, for example, in the following dialogue, Mary expresses her turn with a frown:

**Who's doing the presenting?**

Mary: Are you ready to present this at the meeting?
Jack: Actually, I thought that you were going to be presenting.
Mary: (*frowns*)
Jack: But I suppose I could, if you don't want to.

(Moll 2011)

This slight facial gesture clearly communicates to Jack that something is not right here, in fact, Mary is not in agreement with his first statement. He interprets her frown to mean that she does not want to present the given material; after her silent frown he reworks the task assignment and takes the presentation on himself. In this sense, a small element of non-verbal behavior, in this case a simple frown, has taken the place of talk in a turn. Notice that the behavior is organized in the sense that Mary recognizes that this will constitute her turn, and she places it exactly where talk would otherwise be. What this means is that elements of non-verbal behavior can be used by speakers in the same ways that talk is used, structured, and

[1] David McNeill (2005) is one researcher who has written detailed descriptions of various gesture forms.

organized. In fact, sequentially, Mary could have used either talk or the frown to express her position. Jack, from his side, recognizes both the turn and its meaning, and adjusts accordingly.

Not all forms of non-verbal behavior correlate so precisely to the turn taking schema. Non-verbal communication can also be used to produce single statements, which can be seen throughout advertising and marketing campaigns. Pictures of smiling children might signify the superiority of some new breakfast cereal; a thumbs-up can, in certain cultures, represent the quality of a product or service; even a joyous leap into the air has been used as an advertising tool by banks to represent financial freedom through their services. Such elements of behavior communicate to the recipient the intended message: namely, that this product or service is worth buying! Some auto manufacturers depend on non-verbal messages to present the sportiness, speed, and quality of their products.

## 5.3 Communicative Competence and Non-verbal Interaction

The principle of communicative competence, which we defined in Chap. 1, is just as important for non-verbal interaction as it is for verbal behavior. In fact, misinterpreting a particular non-verbal element can lead to enormous conflict and misunderstanding. When cultural norms collide, people tend to react with emotion. It is therefore extremely important to increase our own awareness of how people interact with one another, taking into account the role of both verbal and non-verbal communication. As a specific example, consider the following event that was reported in the media a few years ago:

> Several years ago, a delegation from Iran traveled to Austria to meet with their EU counterpart. When they discovered that their counterpart was a woman, they refused to shake her hand. She, in turn, cancelled the planned meetings.

The non-verbal behavior from both sides carries a great deal of meaning. What the Austrian woman interpreted from this event was a disrespect of women in general and herself in particular. From her perspective, why should she continue with the meetings if she was not to be taken seriously as an equal counterpart? On the other hand, the Iranians came from a culture where it is forbidden to touch women, especially those who are complete strangers. They were acting out their own norms with this behavior, and from their perspective it was entirely normal. Surprised at her reaction, they argued that they were indeed showing her respect by not touching her.

Both sides in this interaction were less than prepared for this encounter. In the West, gender equality in public as well as private spheres is highly valued and constantly championed, while a complete separation of men and women is very important in other societies, for example, in many parts of the Middle East. Since neither the Austrian woman nor the Iranian delegation appeared informed about the expectations of the other party, we could say that the participants were not communicatively competent regarding this form of non-verbal behavior and what

it communicated. There is, of course, the obvious question of accommodation; namely, who should accommodate who, but this question we will leave for you to answer.

Again, our communicative competence will increase as our awareness increases. This means that we learn to recognize universal behavioral patterns in space, time, and body language, but understand that these can carry culturally-specific meaning. A wave of the hand can mean different things in different contexts, just as a smile does not always signify goodwill or agreement. Arriving on-time might be important for some cultural groups, while arriving on-time can be seen as an affront or a nuisance for other groups. Standing very close or touching another person can carry a meaning of friendliness or solidarity for some, but for others it could also be offensive or far too invasive (linguaggiodelcorpo.il/touch).[2]

## 5.4 Non-verbal Communication and Cultural Patterns

The good news is that we can apply the same theoretical constructs here. **Just as we saw with verbal interaction, we can categorize non-verbal behavioral patterns into the cultural divisions of high or low context, individual or collaborative, and polychronic or monochronic**. Certainly exceptions to these categories exist, but there seems to be enough evidence to allow us to make observations based on trends in cultural behavior. Another important point to remember here is that often we can bundle the patterns in ways that more adequately describe a culture's behavior. So, for example, high context cultures often tend towards more polychronic approaches, while low context cultures can be connected to individual as well as monochronic patterns.

### 5.4.1 High and Low Context Cultures

High context cultures often place an emphasis on building solidarity, or a group-like focus. For a high context culture, such as Italy or Columbia, space requirements can be very small, and close contact tends to be well-accepted. For example, in an airport in Bogota, Columbia, crew members of an international airline were hugging and touching one another as they joked around, waiting for passengers to arrive at the gate. For these people, the proxemics variable of the arm's length distance was not a factor in their business relationship. Soft, playful shoulder and arm touch, as well as good-natured hugging and even slaps on the backside were completely acceptable. None of these gestures carried negative or sexually offensive messages. In fact, the crew members seemed quite at ease with one another. This is very typical

[2] To better understand interpersonal touch, we recommend that you research your target culture specifically. There are a variety of good information sources and virtual libraries that deal with this topic.


**Fig. 5.1** Opening day at Media Markt in Berlin. (Moll 2010)

of a high context culture, where closeness and personal contact tends to be much more acceptable than in a highly individualistic, low context culture (such as, for example, Great Britain or Sweden). For a low-context culture, events such as the one described in Fig. 5.1 are often described as 'crazy' or 'overwhelming'.

How people view cultural space doesn't always have to do with physical distance. At times, non-verbal communication can show a great deal about how a person understands hierarchy and power distance, which are non-physical aspects of space. Take, for example, the following short anecdote:

> Victoria Milman had moved to Italy from Australia to head up a marketing project for a well-known cosmetics company. On her first day with the new staff, she suggested that they call each other by first names. She also mentioned that she had an open-door policy, and that the staff could come to her at any time. She would then make an appointment with them to deal with their issue. In this way, she hoped to quickly overcome the initial tension of having a new project manager. After a few weeks, however, Victoria began to notice that her Italian staff came in and began talking immediately—even while she was on the phone or working on something. Instead of making an appointment, or even asking if she were available, they simply assumed that she could talk with them right at that moment. This frustrated Victoria, who felt that the staff was taking advantage of her openness offer.

In this example we can see how spatial notions differ among cultures. Victoria represents a low context culture where social distance is often represented by authority that is asked, not told, if an appointment is required. While the influence of political correctness in her culture might suggest that employees and managers speak to one another on a first name basis, or that a manager could make a practice of leaving his or her door open, the hierarchical distinction nevertheless requires a certain social distance to be maintained throughout an interaction. When the Italians came into her office and began talking, Victoria understood this to mean that they were not respecting her or her position as the project manager.

From their perspective, the Italians were puzzled at Victoria's frustration. Being on a first-name basis at work dramatically leveled the social distance between the

two parties, and having the door open symbolized an open-for-interaction position. If Victoria were busy, they assumed, she would have had the door closed. Now, on a more leveled workplace hierarchy, and with an open door, the most natural thing in the world for the higher context culture staff was to just walk right in and begin talking. What the two sides were communicating to one another was not clearly understood, since both Victoria and her staff were interpreting the non-verbal behavior within the context of their own expectations. Each side's cultural norms regarding hierarchy and social distance served as the benchmark for how they viewed this situation.

High context cultures also seem to show a greater acceptance of smells. While this might not seem that significant on the surface, consider a business meeting that takes place right after a meal. In some cultural contexts, smelling like garlic, curry, or other spices after lunch can be an indication of how much emphasis the culture puts on historical and regional values in a culture's ethnic, tribal, and even traditional cuisine. Importantly, what is accepted or allowed in a given cultural context tells us a good deal about what people think is important in that culture. In this way, meaning can be transferred even through smells, and not all societies share the same values for what counts as a good smell (Fox 2001).

High context cultures tend to make frequent use of various hand and face motions. Gesturing widely is a common sight in certain high context cultures, and although this can lead to stereotyping, we do see a strong enough trend to be able to make certain observations. For example, Spanish and Italian cultures are considered 'talk with hands' societies. In the Middle East, many cultures use various hand motions in their interactions. Greetings can vary from close hugging or kissing to different forms of hand touch or shaking. Nose touching is practiced in some societies, such as Bedouin and Hawaiian groups.

Researchers have also determined that greetings in some high context cultures can vary based on status or position in society (Neuliep 2006). The higher a person's status, the more rights that person has in initiating and leading the greeting. In some Asian societies, interactants may not make extensive physical contact, but they do use meaningful body languages in their greetings. For example, the depth of a bow will often depend on the status of the person being greeted. Or, for example, a bow with the hands clasped and touching the chin can symbolize high respect with religious connotations.

In contrast, low context cultures tend to be much more reserved when it comes to overt physical touch. Many low context cultures, such as those found in Northern Europe, avoid extensive physical contact. One German executive expressed it this way:

> When someone I don't know touches me, I immediately react with surprise. I don't want anyone touching me unless I know them well, and unless I am good friends with them. It irritates me when strangers touch me.

Greetings in low context societies often are limited to a handshake, although cheek kissing is still practiced among friends in France and Switzerland (almost never with strangers). Head nods and a simple wave can be enough in the US or Canada;

business encounters generally use a firm-grip handshake. The closer the relationship is, the higher the chance of overt physical contact in these lower context societies.[3]

When it comes to business greetings, the metaculture has made our lives a little less complicated. Just as the lingua franca serves as a shared verbal code, often a handshake serves as the shared global means of greeting. The same goes for closings—in general, a simple handshake will be acceptable.

Low context cultures also form tendencies with regard to time attitudes. Many low context cultures are also monochronic cultures; what this means is that time is seen as sequential and an important part of the organization of life. Punctuality is very important in some low context cultures like England, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, and North America. Furthermore these societies propagate this value by instilling it into the educational and governmental systems. Like we saw in the last chapter, not respecting the approach towards time that a culture displays can lead to negative consequences. Bills that are paid late will increase, depending on the amount of time that the bill is overdue. Taxes must be paid by a specific date or there will be further penalties. Coming late to an appointment might result in the cancellation of the appointment.

For low context cultures, physical space is very important. Generally, as we noted above, the personal distance rule is one arm's length in many Western low context cultures. Violating this expectation can cause someone to be perceived as pushy, rude, or overbearing. Again, the metaculture has provided us with a globally possible variant—the one arm's length is acceptable, and while not always practiced consistently, it generally does not cause offense.

Low context cultures often do not tolerate high levels of smell. The general business rule in Belgium is 'no smell' detectable. The same practice goes for many Western countries, including Canada and the US In fact, in these low context cultures, if there is any smell present, it must be of the soap or deodorant variety. One study done on the relationship between culture and smell detection found that 'the biggest users of fragrance in the world are US based companies like Procter & Gamble, Lever Bros., and Colgate' (Gibbons, in Neuliep 2006).

### 5.4.2 Individual and Collective Cultures

Whether low or high context, cultures also vary in terms of their grouping mentalities. Just as we saw in verbal interaction, individualistic cultures tend to focus on and value personal achievement. Often, individual cultures are also a low context type. In this cultural context, self-help books are everywhere. People are raised with

[3] One factor that must be mentioned is **political correctness**. Just as politically correct speech is highly valued in a society like the US, so also is politically correct gesture and other non-verbal interaction important. Not shaking a woman's hand simply because she is a woman could cause major relational damage in various cultures. Creating obvious distance between yourself and someone of another ethnic heritage can also be seen as highly offensive. Obviously, certain social factors such as religion and gender approaches complicate the picture, since in some societies touching women is forbidden.


**Fig. 5.2** Individualistic advertising. (calendars.com)

the idea that their purpose in life is to 'be all that you can be'. Being unique and developing your own personal style is prevalent, whether this is in private life or in business life.

Nowhere is the notion of individual achievement and personal improvement more evident than in advertising and marketing campaigns. For example, consider the typical automobile advertisement.

> Private automobiles are inherently supportive of a world view that is dependent on the primacy of the separate self. Many advertisements stress the difference between the "quiet comfort" found inside the car and the chaos and malevolence of the world outside. In most car ads, not a single driver can be seen, not a single open door. The division between inside and outside is total. A person privileged enough to be inside the car needn't concern themselves with what is happening outside, beyond a bland appreciation of the unpeopled mountain landscapes which present themselves unproblematically in the distance. The emissions coming from the tailpipe are someone else's problem. These metal skins in which we encase ourselves are a manifestation of a mindset which is inherently self-absorbed. (Fojambe 2010)

Advertisements like the one in Fig. 5.2 are classic examples of the focus on the individual.

The fashion industry depends upon such individualistic thinking to be able to market certain products. Because of the drive to 'be unique' and to develop one's own style, fashion producers cater to clients by creating one-of-a-kind fashion statements. Ironically, since so many are trying to create individual fashion statements, members of such cultures can at times seem strangely alike.

A further area where we can see individualistic cultural values is in the notion of relationships. Many individualists tend to see themselves as specific actors in a relationship that will in some way benefit themselves. Relationships are mostly built on a person-to-person basis, and each individual is treated as inherently equal.

By way of contrast, collective cultures focus much more on the group as a whole. The rise and fall of an organization or company depends upon the collective efforts of each member. Here we can observe an interesting paradox. Although a collective

culture will focus on the efforts all the members of the society or organization, the variable of hierarchy often plays a even stronger role in these cultures, which means that a clear and visible distinction between the employee and the employer must be evident. A specific example of this was related by a social scientist who tracked the development of a young American CEO in a Malaysian firm.

> On his first day at work, Dan was given a large and luxurious Mercedes sedan to drive. Being rather sports-oriented, he asked to have it exchanged for a simple Jeep, which he could then take on personal excursions on weekends. The staff looked at him blankly, and then asked if he wanted them to come to work on bicycles. It took Dan a while to understand that they could not drive any vehicle that was of higher status than the Jeep, since he was at the top of the hierarchy. If the best company car was a Jeep, then that would leave few choices for the rest of the staff to drive.

Since collective cultures value the group, teamwork and solidarity building are very important to them. So, for example, Japanese production culture might place an emphasis on the team that produced a particular project, not simply the individual that designed it. The whole idea of the 'open office system' developed from this approach. The idea is that for group productivity to be at its highest, information must flow freely. The open office would allow for such information flow, and would minimize the resistance to and natural barriers to passing on critical information about the company. In an individualistic context, often the size, location, and appearance of a personal office carries value—how many times have we heard the expression, 'That decision comes from the corner office' meaning a decision made by someone high up on the company hierarchy. This sort of arrangement does not always hold true for the collective context. People value constant and close information exchange, and at times the employees form a sort of 'company family' (just as we saw in Chap. 4 in the dialogue regarding layoffs). In essence, the well-being of the individual member will thus depend upon the performance and well-being of the whole group.

It is important that we acknowledge here that **cultural contexts are not homogeneous**. What this means is that not every member of an individualistic culture will be individualistic, and the same goes for collective culture members. We know that there is a considerable amount of personality-based variety even within cultural boundaries; earlier we referred to this as **intracultural** differences. One interesting study regarding advertising norms highlighted this phenomenon. Researchers examining the effectiveness of advertising methods in Germany and China found that while the individualistic German market was more receptive to individualistic marketing methods, the collectivist Chinese culture responded well to both types of advertisements. The researchers came to the conclusion that focusing more on an individualistic advertising and marketing campaign for either culture type could be highly effective (Diehl et al. 2003). As we mentioned earlier, however, strong trends in cultural behavior do allow us to make some observations and practical behavioral suggestions.[4]

[4] For additional research dealing with advertising and cultural variables, see www.ikv.uni-saarland.de/Institut.

### 5.4.3 Polychronic and Monochronic Cultures

E. T. Hall (1984) can be credited with defining and setting out the parameters by which we measure cultural approaches to time. In fact, as we saw in Chap. 3, cultures tend towards a polychronic or a monochronic view of time and ordering. This means that monochronic cultures see time as a sequential, tangible property that helps us to order and compartmentalize tasks based on their importance in our lives. Monochronics tend to take time very seriously and often cling to agendas and time management principles, as we have seen. Time can be wasted, or lost, or gained in a monochronic society.[5]

Non-verbal attitudes towards time show up a variety of ways in a monochronic society. As we noticed above, members of such cultures are often expected to adhere to the given time scheduling, and there can be penalties for diverging from the expectations. But there are other ways that monochronics express their views on how time works. One way is through the notion of fast and slow messages. Many monochronic societies work on a tight, moment-by-moment schedule, and this is visible in the ways that companies market their products and services. Flashing and colorful, quick messages make up most of the television advertisements, for example. Commercials are typically noisy, and most segments are sold in very short units (15–30 seconds of air space).

Polychronic cultures take a more holistic view of time. For these societies, time is rather more a concept, and can be dealt with flexibly, depending upon other more important variables. Hierarchy will almost always outrank time schedules in a polychronic society, which is exactly what we saw in Chap. 4 with the setting appointments dialogue. While monochronic cultures tend to place an emphasis on present and especially the future, polychronic cultures often have a strong connection to the past. So, for example, history plays an enormous role in many Arab and Israeli cultures. Interestingly, for some groups, time is not measurable. For example, Hall also describes his extensive fieldwork with some Native American Indian tribes. He found that in many cases, the Indians did not see time as something that was to be measured or divided into discreet units. Instead, time was a sequence of events that simply differed from context to context.

At times, organizations will communicate their values simply by the decisions that they take. Consider, for example, the practice of foreign investment. Whether the members of an organization are in tune with the geographical and historical relationships of cultures can often be seen by noting the types of cultures into which they are willing to invest:

> In early 2002, the German emissions-testing company DEKRA Automotive sought to expand its foreign market potential. Several markets were tentatively initiated, including acquiring at least one emission-testing company in the Unites States. Although the US endeavor was profitable, within 2 years DEKRA quickly reformulated its foreign

[5] This notion is not without its critics. Some researchers (Eriksen 2001) argue that the advent of time management and time saving technology actually results in the loss of personal time for critical thinking and reflection during the day.

investment vision and pulled out of that market. Instead, the company focused its efforts on building up a uniquely European presence, and transferred most of its resources towards acquiring the lead emissions control organization in France.

Obviously many factors will play a role in foreign investment decisions, but the cultural considerations cannot be ignored. Since profitability was not the major factor in DEKRA's decision, the objective of forming a strong European presence communicated an important message on the company's values. Some researchers have done further studies on foreign investment cultural correlations (www.palgrave-journals.com).

As we have seen, non-verbal communication can be portrayed in a variety of ways throughout cultural contexts. It is important to remember that the cultural patterns that we have just described are not representative of every single member of a society—as we noted, people differ even within a cultural boundary in terms of their behavior.

## 5.5 Understanding Cultural Values

Do we have to talk about religion?! After all, the metaculture has provided us with a global set of behavioral patterns with which we can hope to conduct most of our intercultural interactions. However, here we argue that cultural perceptions of values indeed matter in how we do business, and especially how we communicate to one another what we see as important. In this section, therefore, we will look at both the **perceptions of social relationships** (including such constructs as gender and family structures) as well as **perceptions of social and moral values** (including religion, ethics, and even cultural views on wealth).

There are specific advantages in examining interactional behavior in this way. One advantage is to increase our own exposure to various ways of presenting reality, and building a social identity especially at work. Furthermore, increased observation and analysis provide us with the tools to analyze other interactions in our future cultural encounters. In this way, we can learn to make less emotionally-based judgments, and instead react to unexpected behavior in ways that display our knowledge of how cultures work.

Of course, we must again acknowledge that there are limitations in looking at how cultures deal with relationships and religion. For example, just as we saw with verbal interaction, focus on one element of behavior can mask or cloud the importance of another element. Stressing the history and value of religious rituals in various cultural contexts can hide the equally important development of secularization in that same context. And furthermore, no culture is completely homogeneous; what this means is that although we find strong tendencies and trends in local cultural behavior, not every member of such culture will react in the same way. In fact, intracultural differences are at times important indications of regional variety, individual personality traits, and inevitable cultural change.

### 5.5.1 Perceptions of Social Relationships

Building relationships with one another is part of our basic human lifestyle. How cultural contexts shape relationships, however, differs widely. For example, one of the most visible forms of relational differences is located in the approaches to **gender**. In some cultures, women are seen as equal and valid members of the society, whereas in others they are considered as second or even third-class members and are expected to subjugate themselves to the male members of that society. Historically, the spread of feminism has led to quite a bit of change regarding the status of women in certain areas of the globe; other cultural contexts have experienced less change and have a much more static approach. Again, however, such change is not complete, and there still remains significant variety within regions on how women are treated.

Education and career opportunities are one area in which cultures express their position or stance on the inherent status of women. Highly collective cultures, which often focus more on the dynamics of the group, more often value women as caretakers of the home and children, which of course preserves the natural group structure. In such contexts, women are taught to raise children, keep the home, and to help their husbands. For some women, this is an acceptable situation, and many women choose this path for their lives because they feel it is fulfilling.

When it comes to doing business in such cultures, it is important to remain aware of these tendencies, and to take care in how you portray your own expectations vis-à-vis your target culture. Sending a woman manager into a strongly male-dominated society can be frustrating and even destructive to both sides in the interaction. On the other hand, if your gender expectations are that men should be the leaders in an organization, while women remain in subordinate positions, then you will most likely encounter resistance and even hostility if you carry your expectations into a society where women are encouraged to develop into prominent business roles. Here we are not suggesting that one or the other approach is necessarily right or wrong; being careful to understand and act with sensitivity will display your level of intercultural competence.

Furthermore, other cultural variables can be mixed with gender attitudes, and create very different interpretations of the position of a woman. The major variable that plays a strong role in this issue is religion. In fact, in very religious cultural situations, women do not only have less access to education and career choice, they are not encouraged to function as a member of society independent from their family circumstance. For example, in certain Islamic societies, women are often prohibited from displaying any part of their body publically. For some women, this means wearing long sleeves, long trousers or skirts, and a headscarf. For others, it means completely being covered by the burka or the niqab (a full body and facial covering). Even color, in this context, is discouraged, so that many burkas are totally black. The idea is to bring as little physical attention to the woman as possible.

There are opposing interpretations of this type of gender behavior. Some would argue that such cultures are often characterized as repressing the woman's individuality, and from a Western standpoint are radically oppressive. From this perspective,


**Fig. 5.3** Opposing views of the required Moslem niqab and burka. (islamwatch.org; newzstreet.com)

women are not individually valued members of society, but rather they represent the property of a man. On the other hand, however, advocates of such standards argue that, far from being repressive, the burka actually frees the woman from being enslaved to the fashion stereotypes of society. Such opposing interpretations are captured in Fig. 5.3.

Again, we leave the answer to this debate to you—but encourage you to act with awareness in such a cultural context.

Not all high-context, collective cultures operate with religion as the strongest variable. Mexico, for example, is a high-context culture where women are often relegated to the household and its responsibilities, but at the same time occupy a rather strong and powerful role within their family structure. Italy, too, tends towards a maternal leadership role within the context of the home and family. In these cases, the family variable appears to take precedence in how people communicate what they value. When it comes to hiring in such societies, often women will occupy a stronger percentage of the general workforce rather than management positions. One notable exception to this trend is in family-owned businesses, where traditional family relationships play a much stronger role. In cultures where individualism and personal achievement are highly valued, often women have the option to choose a family-based or career-based life, or even both. So for example, in a highly individualistic culture such as the US, the numbers of women in the workplace have increased dramatically over time:

> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, white men (who once dominated the workplace) now account for about 45 % of all workers. White women and women of color make up 47 % of the workplace. In 1995, 76 % of women between the ages of 25 and 54 worked outside the home, up from 50 % in 1970. (www.faqs.org)

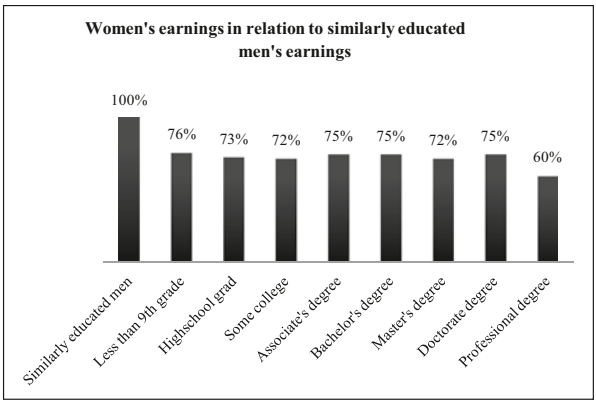



**Fig. 5.4** Wage earning differences. (Adapted from Lips 2009)

Some more secular cultures promote a statistical balance of genders, so that companies or schools are required to accept a certain number of women regardless of the qualifications or talent pool of applicants. But even in these societies, often the gap in pay between men and women with the same or equivalent qualifications is still evident. For example, psychologist and researcher Hilary Lips found that wages, even in a low-context, individualistic culture like the US, differ between men and women, regardless of ethnic origin. The situation, according to Lips, is rather obvious when quantified (Fig. 5.4).

According to Lips, women with the highest level of education experience the largest gap when compared to men with an equivalent education. Furthermore, she argues that this wage gap is found in almost every career available. What this means is that even in cultures that value individual achievement and personal improvement, the values for gender could play a stronger role in day to day understanding of what is meaningful for people (Ahearn 2001; www.thelocal.de/society; www.cbc.ca/canada/census-families).

A discussion of cultural approaches to relationships must include the issue of gay and lesbian partnerships. Of course, we can easily access media reports of cultures that absolutely prohibit homosexuality in any form. The atmosphere in Uganda, for example, has grown increasingly outspoken against the homosexual lifestyle ('Anti-gay atmosphere'). In this culture, being gay or lesbian can carry the death penalty, or a lifetime prison sentence. Not an isolated example, Uganda follows the practice of many highly religious societies, such as Moslem and Christian contexts.[6]

Other more secularized cultures show a higher acceptance of the various homosexual relationships, although again this tends to be a divisive issue for some groups and sub-groups. Current political trends in such areas are to formulate laws and regulations against 'hate' behavior towards gays and lesbians; this essentially

[6] Here it is interesting to note that although most Moslem cultures are still radically opposed to homosexuality, many Christian elements are changing on this issue. More and more groups are affiliating with the homosexual movement in the US, a society where marriage and partnerships were traditionally founded on Biblical principles of heterogenic relationships.

means that people are increasingly expected to show each other egalitarian treatment—in other words, to display the culture's presumed value that each individual regardless of race, gender, or even sexual preference is to be treated equally. Hiring, promotions, and general business atmospheres are process expected to take such regulations into account. The fact that not everyone practices this sort of equal treatment is a testament to the developmental stage of such value acceptance.

### 5.5.2 Business Friendships

Other forms of social relationships include various forms friendships, hierarchical and organizational structures, peer structures, and of course stranger to stranger contact. Again, here we find trends in cultural patterns of how people relate to one another. For example, in high-context, collective, and polychronic cultures, friendship often requires an attempt at building solidarity and extensive involvement in strengthening the contact. For most people, it takes time and effort to solidify a friendship.

Business encounters, for example, are not merely relegated to discussing the particulars of the contract, product, or service. A good deal of time is spent in getting to know the other party on a more personal level—this is why Italians and French, for example, will often include mealtimes in the appointments. Clearly this clashes with a low-context, individualistic, monochronic person who is tied to schedules and achievement. Many Germans, for example, who are expecting a concise, efficient business meeting, have expressed frustration during encounters with high-context cultures like Spain, where both punctuality and the level of personal small talk differs dramatically from the low-context, individualistic Germans. On the other hand, from the Spanish perspective, such an achievement-based approach can seem cold and indifferent.

For some cultures, building a personal relationship is critical in order to do business with the other party:

> Frank Schmidt arrived in New Delhi with a great proposal for his Indian clients. He knew that their edge on the communications market was strong, and he felt that the joint-venture he was proposing would be gladly accepted. After being picked up at the airport, Frank wanted to begin discussions immediately. His hosts offered to introduce him to a local mealtime as well as visit an important cultural temple, but Frank declined. His counter-suggestion was to begin their talks immediately; he could have dinner at the hotel later. After all, he was on a rather tight schedule, and wanted to cover the meeting points as efficiently as possible.
>
> Although Frank's enthusiasm for this joint-venture was obvious, he was shocked when his Indian counterparts declined the offer. He later learned that the New Delhi firm felt that he would not have been a serious and reliable partner.

In this interaction, Frank committed the fatal flaw of non-preparation: had he an adequate understanding of the cultural expectations, he would have known that personal relationships are very important in India. Taking the time to develop such acquaintances would have made an enormous difference in the response that Frank received to his proposal. Importantly, while the deal was great from Frank's per-

spective, it was not a strong enough motivation to the New Delhi firm to overcome the cultural barriers to a long-term joint-venture. Since the Indians did not feel respected or important, why would they want to enter into a deal with Frank? In other words, pure economic benefit is not an overriding factor in every cultural context.

### 5.5.3 Stranger to Stranger Contact

Stranger to stranger contact is often an area of misunderstanding and cultural incompetence. For the Swiss, it is very important to be able to look one another in the eyes when greeting. Some African and Asian cultures avoid direct eye contact, because it can carry a meaning of disrespect and arrogance. Obviously, the collision of these opposing values in greetings can potentially create enormous rifts in cultural interactions. Interestingly enough, it is possible to locate and follow social change when it comes to managed relationships.

One common complaint regarding Americans is that they are far too superficial in stranger to stranger contact. This is due to the high level of politeness that developed as the norm in casual conversation in many areas of the US So, a friendly smile and attempt at helpfulness was very important in developing communicative competence in that culture. Treating people with friendly hospitality was expected, and this of course led to the common claim that Americans were surface friendly, but didn't really mean what they said. However, over time, this value has been changing. Due to social, political, and economic changes in the US, the younger generations especially practice much less the external level of politeness. It is becoming increasingly more common for visitors to the US to experience rather distant and indifferent treatment. One woman put it this way:

> Getting through the airport in Atlanta is no longer a pleasant experience. People don't talk with one another, and when I got to the customs desk, the agent just asked me short, pointed questions. Not to mention the security staff—I felt almost as if I had done something wrong. When I tried to be friendly and smile, all I received in return was a severe stare. (Personal communication)

### 5.5.4 Power

When we communicate, power is always involved in some way. Perhaps you might think that during communication both parties are always equal, but this is rarely the case. How people manage their relationships vis-à-vis one another differs depending upon context and situation, but most of the time some form of power is in place. For example, in a classroom situation, the role of the instructor automatically grants that person a degree of power, since they are directing the class and assigning grades. At work, the leadership is just that—their role is to direct and guide the company. Organizations also have a person or a group at the helm. Of course, cultures differ in how they define leadership positions—as you have seen, age and hierarchy play a strong role in high-context, collective, polychronic cultures, while

often individual achievement and personal development play an important role in low-context, individualistic, monochronic societies.

We have examined various forms of verbal communication that display or negotiate power within interactions. Non-verbal forms of communication also tell us a good deal about how people perceive themselves in relation to others and the situation. For example, consider the following account of a Thai secretary who had to learn to diplomatically adapt the details of her American boss' individualistic approach into her own very collective cultural expectations:

> I believe in the United States of America it is common for a boss to ask the secretary to request some materials from another person or to call people and tell them the boss wants to see them. In the United States of America, you all look at each other as equals. It is not so important what someone's title is, their age, or time with the company. In Thailand, those things are very important. For example, my boss, who is an American, was always asking me to go call so-and-so and request a meeting or go talk to so-and-so and get some reports from them. By having me do this, the Thais were wondering several things: Why should we deal with her; she is just a secretary, and have I done something wrong that the boss does not want to talk with me? Finally, I got my boss to understand that when he had a request for someone—especially someone who was high-ranking in the company, someone who was much older than me or had been with the company longer than me—I would write a short note to that person, he would sign it, then I would pass the note along. That way, everyone's face was saved, their positions were recognized, and the boss came across as showing that he cared about his personal relationship with everyone. Mind you, I can run over and ask others of my same rank, age, or time with the company for any information or a meeting, but it is important to show respect toward those in high positions. (Quoted in Martin and Nakayama 2007:111)

### 5.5.5 Social Relationships and the Metaculture

The metaculture, which we discussed in detail in Chap. 2, has a lot to do with people's perceptions of culture and social relationships. Extensive access to the media and its portrayal of mostly Western norms has had an effect on what we tend to view as the structure of various relationships. Specifically, Hollywood has conditioned many of us to see love and personal attraction as the basis for successful marriage and partnerships. The notion of arranged marriage is often portrayed in movies, films, and literature as a historical practice, somewhat relegated to the past. Globalization has carried such values around the globe, to the extent that many if not most cultures are increasingly (though not totally) adopting Western norms of courtship practices (Ahearn 2001, 2009). Other forms of social relationships are also susceptible to the influence of the metaculture, whether these are various forms of friendship or power negotiation.

Nevertheless, deeply rooted cultural practices and histories still play a vital role in how people live out their lives and interact with one another. One way of representing some of the trends we can find is by grouping certain issues in terms of how they are approached. Of course, such a representation does not account for individual differences, but it does give us a tool with which we can make further observations (Fig. 5.5).

| Low context<br>Individualistic | High context<br>Collective |
|---|---|
| **Interpersonal relationships** | **Interpersonal relationships** |
| Marriage | Marriage |
| Civil partnerships | Limited civil partnerships |
| Homosexual relationships | |
| Homosexual marriage | |
| **Power and relationships** | **Power and relationships** |
| Individual achievement | Hierarchy |
| Independent wealth | Age |
| | Inherited wealth |
| | Family dynasties |
| **Social equality** | **Social equality** |
| Men and women can be socially equal | Men and women occupy different roles |
| Most education equally available | Limited equal education |
| Many jobs equally available | Limited equal jobs |
| Pay standards differentiated | Pay standards differentiated |

**Fig. 5.5** Cultural approaches to social issues. (Moll 2011)

### 5.5.6 A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words

Advertising and marketing campaigns can tell us a great deal about how a culture understands values such as health, wealth, and beauty. While the metaculture has admittedly had an enormous influence on advertising norms, it is still a prime area indicating how people communicate their values non-verbally. Business dress standards will often be a direct reflection of how local cultures have been influenced by global advertising.

The television tells us that beauty is external. Commercials of all sorts proclaim the superiority of their product, and leave the viewer with the impression that buyers of that product will be as attractive as the model advertising it. Many Maybelline cosmetic products, for example, flout gorgeous movie stars who tell us that they buy Maybelline products '…because I'm worth it!' As we saw above, some cultures are rather obsessed with cosmetic products and their ability to mask the natural body odors and features. One French woman described it this way: 'I don't leave my apartment unless I have makeup on!'

The enormous cosmetic market is a good indication of how many cultures globally value personal appearance standards which are often set by the various media. While this is the case, we do find some interesting differences in certain geographical regions. One modern cosmetic market research organization offered hundreds of cutting-edge statistical reports for Europe, North America, and Asia, while market information and availability for Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, and various island cultures numbered far less—in the twenties and thirties. Only three reports were available to detail the statistics of the Caribbean. What this indicates is that these cultures do not extensively promote the value of the same processes of beautification that are normal in some others ('Cosmetics').

What counts as healthy often displays the basic cultural division of wealth. In developed nations, where food is plentiful, being healthy often is associated with a strong, lean body. Being able to practice sports of various kinds, not being overweight, and physical mobility are benchmarks for health. For example, the Swiss culture promotes this view of health throughout both the educational arena as well as the general public. Schools place an enormous importance on sports, both in and outside the classroom, and most Swiss students are expected to learn to ski or snowboard. In fact, schools have mandatory ski trips where the entire class is bussed to a ski resort to learn this important cultural sport. The Swiss combine their active lifestyles with walking: again, school children are expected to walk to school in rain, snow, or sunshine. Biking is regularly organized from early on, and walking, biking and traffic laws are taught to the children as early as kindergarten.

Such attention to fitness is carried into the business arena. Many companies will offer multiple sports events throughout the year to their employees, and employees are expected to participate. One job-seeker was actually told on the phone not to bother to come to an interview unless he was physically fit, since the company wished to stress a healthy image through its products and employees.[7]

Other cultures, such as that in Vietnam, depend upon this sort of lifestyle as crucial to transportation determination, and less as a predetermined means of fitness. Economic considerations prohibit many people from owning cars, so an active physical lifestyle is imperative to get to work. Here the values have less to do with health, and more to do with absolute necessity.

There are times when a collision of values occurs. When this happens, we are able to clearly identify how social values are communicated or violated. For example, the well-known social issues photographer Olivero Toscani created quite a stir when he launched a campaign against deadly eating disorders, specifically anorexia. Using painfully thin model images, Toscani publically portrayed the naked human body and the results of such a disorder. He argued that this was an attempt at slowing the growing reaction to fashion advertising in the West which portrays only thin women and men as beautiful. His photography was shocking to some (Fig. 5.6).

Critics argued that such images not only exploited the women suffering from eating disorders, but they also encouraged such women to continue these patterns

[7] Personal communication with the company kyBun, located in Roggwil, Switzerland.


**Fig. 5.6** 'No anorexia' campaign promoted by Oliviero Toscani. (newsimg.bbc.co.uk)

of behavior in order to achieve publicity and visibility. Toscani countered that the risk this campaign takes is worth it to counter pervasive stereotypes of attractive women globally.

When it comes to images, it is important also to note that scenery, especially regionally valued views, is an indication of the importance of the physical earth, its features, and its preservation. Whereas in some areas artwork focuses on survival issues, such as hunting, other areas place the focus on the earth itself in relation to human existence and development. Such attention to the environment is growing, usually in direct connection with the spread of globalization and industry. In fact, recently even the Vatican published a list of 'new sins' that are apparently brought about by modern times. One of these sins included pollution that causes permanent environmental damage ('Vatican').[8]

Attention to such issues is not of secondary importance when doing business interculturally. One Western cosmetics firm discovered this first-hand when expanding their research and production facilities to the Middle East:

> One of the main issues that this cosmetics company wanted to develop was a closer coordination and attention to environmental issues. With the current global concern on climate conditions and global warming, most modern cosmetic companies found themselves competing with one another to produce waste-minimizing products in an environmentally-friendly manner.
> The call for 'greener production' had been a turning point in hiring the current project manager, a woman, to head up the Middle Eastern research sector, since she had written her thesis on better environmental protection in production methods and research development. Now she had to apply the theory to a practical level, working with cultures that often epitomized the extremes of wealth and poverty.

[8] It is interesting to note here that the attitude towards damaging the environment appears to be a global concern, although it directly confronts other societal values such as building wealth. Recent Kyoto agreements and failures attest to this issue and display the control of politics over other cultural objectives.

Furthermore, the purchasing data showed that many Arab clients preferred a glamorous, shiny packaging for their cosmetic products. This in itself was a challenge to the notion of developing recyclable packaging that would serve as a step towards more environmentally-friendly products.

The Western project manager had introduced the idea of scaling back the glitz of the packaging in order to offer more biodegradable containers and boxes, but the Vice President of Marketing had clearly opposed it, citing the tendency of the clientele to avoid the bland, less colorful or non-shiny products. The current gold packaged products that the company was using were very difficult to recycle, since the external coloring was too intense to be included in a regular recycling facility.

Now the project manager had to come up with some creative alternatives that would appeal to the preferences of the clientele in the Arab world, while at the same time meeting higher environmentally conscious standards. She hoped that with an attention to a more natural, fresh line of colors, she could also work in a more practical packaging product.

The collision of what counted as important in this intercultural business endeavor posed a unique challenge to the project manager and forced the project manager to come up with a creative compromise.

### 5.5.7 Cultural Perceptions of Wealth

Materialism, and the pursuit of wealth, is arguably everywhere. That is, we find examples of materialism within and across all cultures. However, interestingly enough, there are observable trends with regard to how positively cultures view the accumulation of money, as well as how other factors than monetary wealth take on greater significance. For example, having a home and a vehicle is of high importance in many places. Personal property often symbolizes individual wealth and prosperity. Countries such as Germany are widely known for their obsession with cars, and the quality and value of one's car can indicate social status and economic stability.

In fact, an entire television channel devoted only to marketing luxury items is available in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. Arab states advertise exclusive shopping centers, tempting the wealthy of the world to come and profit from the offered products. Having double-car garages, flat-screen televisions, and personal swimming pools tend to mark wealth and status in the US In France and Italy, multiple homes as well as exquisite fashion imply one's social status. One of the world's largest markets, China, emphasizes the possession of the newest and best brands, be it in technology or fashion. Shopping centers, sometimes called 'temples of materialism', can often indicate the degree to which a society focuses on accumulation of product and wealth.

Some researchers argue that the media portrayal of wealth has a reductionist tendency in that it represents mostly Western norms of what is valuable, and has furthermore extended into schools and educational organizations (Finnemore 1996). This further strengthens the metacultural ideas that we tend to see globally regarding wealth, how it is defined, and how to accumulate it.

One fascinating exception to this view of wealth is found on the Indian continental region. There, in the Kingdom of Bhutan, wealth is measured by happiness,

or contentment. Officially known as GNH (gross national happiness), the value of happiness has been argued as preferable by King Wangchuck:

> "Being a small country, we do not have economic power. We do not have military muscle. We cannot play a dominant international role, because of our small size and population and because we are a landlocked country. The only factor we can fall back on… which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have." And so the government has kept a tight grip on matters of culture, which have grown out of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism. In 1999, only 7,000 foreign visitors were granted visas, and for 2000 the figure rose only to 7,559. Police are empowered to detain any Bhutanese not wearing official national dress, the robe like gho for men and the jacket and apronlike kira for women. It was perfectly in keeping with this strict but benign paternalism that the King should proclaim that "gross national happiness is more important than gross national product" because "happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process". ('Bhutan')

Measuring wealth in terms of happiness might seem to be an exotic idea, but in fact cultures around the world have given it a nod of understanding. Even in the most materialistic societies, people at some point note the importance and inherent value of happiness. For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the United States of America 1939 State of the Union address, said that 'the overwhelming majority of our people seek a greater opportunity for humanity to prosper and find happiness. They recognize that human welfare has not increased and does not increase through mere materialism and luxury, but that it does progress through integrity, unselfishness, responsibility and justice …' (Roosevelt 1939). It remains to be seen whether current growing interest in measuring personal well-being through benchmarks such as health, personal relationships, and even purpose in life will solidify across cultures.

## 5.6 Summary

In summary, we have seen that cultures use extensive forms of non-verbal interaction to communicate what is meaningful in a specific context. This sort of interaction can take the form of body language, facial expressions, and gestures, but it can also take the form of corporate decisions, identities, and even advertising. While the metaculture has had an enormous influence on our globalized world and our business practices, it is still possible to see colorful variation both within and across cultures and geographical regions.

Non-verbal communication—whether business or non-business—is fascinating. How people make sense of their world, how they communicate what is important to them varies dramatically based on cultural context. However, the fact is that interaction of this sort is everywhere, and our main task is to learn to recognize instances of, and analyze, non-verbal ways of expressing meaning. Of course we cannot cover every aspect of non-verbal communication here, just as we saw with verbal communication. What we have done is offer you some closer glimpses into the overall picture of human interactional behavior. As we noted above, freezing a small section of human behavior out of the total picture gives us the opportunity to

take each element apart in our own time constraints. By taking apart the details of such interactions, it is possible to identify practices and trends that help us to make intelligent and informed observations. These in turn, if properly viewed and applied, should enable you to increase you communicative competence and ultimately successful intercultural interactions.

# Conclusion: Your Successful Intercultural Business Interaction

# 6

In conclusion, the flavor of cultural diversity is evident even within our most factual business interactions. What people feel is important is communicated not only through their business talk, but also through their styles, decisions, choices, and body language. Obviously a few pages cannot do justice to the complexity of the human spirit. Instead we have described basic principles of communication, supported by examples of business interaction, that focus on the tremendous impact our cultural norms and expectations have on the very structure of our interactions with one another.

Maybe you were hoping that we would give you a list of do's and don'ts for how to communicate in any intercultural situation. We feel that such a list would not serve you well for various reasons. As we have seen, business situations change constantly and there is not one set of ready-made formulas to apply to all your interactions. Secondly, personal factors can and will show up even in business interactions. Because of this, we feel it is important to recognize that intercultural business communication is subject to the same human reactions and emotions that you find in other areas of communication. Understanding the process of how people portray themselves and their values in life is much more important.

Being able to adapt to the situation in which you find yourself is crucial. Remember, your interpretation of events might be just as surprising to someone else as theirs is to you. How people value time, how they conceptualize it, and whether or not their lives are structured by it is but one example of this. Is history as important to the target culture as the present is? Does hierarchy play an important role? Perceptions of space, as we have seen, often are tied to cultural norms. Business decisions, such as layoffs or outsourcing, can be clues to how individualistic or group-oriented that culture is. Employee benefit packages can communicate how a culture sees the family structure. How a business advertises its products, or how they approach environmental issues will tell us a lot about what that culture sees as moral behavior.

Your successful business communication will take such factors into account. In other words, the quintessential aspect of intercultural business communication is how aware you are of other people's cultural expectations that are displayed in their communications, and how you choose to respond to these expectations.

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Quintessence Series, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-28238-6_6,

Instead of memorizing rules, therefore, learn to observe how people are acting in the world around us. Watch how people interact with one another. Who is successful, and who isn't? Can you see examples of cultural orientations in their communication? What about your own communication style—do you insist on being very direct in your negotiations with others? Is individual achievement a high priority in your culture? No one is suggesting that you change who you are, but remember that yours is not the only perspective.

People have different orientations to important human constructs, such as time, space, hierarchy, gender, ethics, etc. These orientations are evidenced by and through both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Don't be fooled by the metaculture—remember that there are many attitudes and practices that can be found under the surface level of interaction. Use your increased awareness of the structure of communication to help you make sense of the interactions going on around you, whether in business or in any other intercultural situation.

Most importantly, accept the fact that people do and see things differently. Variety of thought and action can widen our minds and spirits. We recommend that you take advantage of it. In other words, don't build walls; build bridges. After all, it is easier to walk across a bridge than it is to climb a wall.

# Glossary

**Accommodation (cultural)** When one participant adapts him or herself to the cultural norms or expectations of the other(s) in the interaction.

**Agency** The notion of being responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the action or event of an individual or group.

**Awareness** The ability to recognize and identify different behavioral patterns as these are connected to and influenced by various cultures.

**Bald imperative** A command that is formed with only the verb and the complement, and without any softeners, for example, 'Shut the door!'.

**Chronemics** The attitudes and approaches to time that people display in their behavior.

**Communication** The sharing of any message by any means from one entity to another.

**Communicative competence** The ability of a person to understand the actual intended message of another.

**Collaborative cultures** Cultures which highly value group-focused, collective behaviors.

**Cultural adaption** The notion of one interactant conforming to the expectations of the other(s).

**Cultural space** The physical and social distances tolerated by members of a culture.

**Culture** The meaningful way in which people behave in their social contexts.

**Culture carriers** People who, through mobility and migration patterns, carry elements of a cultural group from one geographical region to another.

**Cultural norms** Those behaviors that people from one group expect and consider acceptable.

**Cultural patterns** Recurring patterns of behavior dealing with space, time, hierarchy, gender, religion, ethics, values, etc.

**Direct style** Speech style which does not contain softeners or many forms of politeness in order to diminish any harshness in the message; often the shortest grammatical form of a message.

**Discourse** Written or spoken communication.

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**Discursive** Fluid; used here to indicate the sense in which a cultural pattern can be reinforced by being in continual usage.

**Dynamic** Subject to change and modification based on incoming influences and contextual factors; not stagnant.

**Embedded directive** A directive that contains various modals or question formats, such as 'Could you please finish this proposal by tomorrow?'.

**Globalization** The increased contact and interaction of world cultures and economies due to technological, social and political advances.

**Global village** The interconnectivity of all geographical regions of our planet due to technological advance.

**High context culture** A culture in which a great deal of contextual information is shared by all members of the society; overlap of business and private life spheres common.

**Hint statement** A request that is disguised by a hint, such as 'It's cold in here' but which carries a more specific meaning, such as 'Please close the window'.

**Indirect style** Speech style which contains softeners or various forms of politeness in order to diminish any harshness in the message; often the longest grammatical form of a message.

**Individualistic culture** A culture type which focuses on the achievements and products of a single individual or organization.

**Information speed** The rate at which any message is transmitted; tolerance for fast or slow messages depend on the cultural context.

**Intracultural communication** Communication that takes place within the regional or social boundaries of a single culture.

**Intercultural communication** Communication that takes place among regional or social boundaries of at least two cultures.

**Kinesics** Non-verbal communication behavior that is often related to body movement.

**Language use** How people actually employ language to achieve certain goals and accomplish interaction (not proficiency).

**Lingua franca** A shared code of meaning among two or more groups which has become standardized and is reproducible.

**Low context culture** A culture in which only limited contextual information is shared by all members of the society; overlap of business and private life spheres is not common, but rather distinctly categorized.

**Metaculture** The layer of globally shared behavior that operates on the surface level of global interaction.

**Monochronic culture** A culture type that is displays a high value for time, schedules, and sequential task orientation; often monochronic cultures emphasize the present and future.

**Need statement** A request or directive that is formed by putting the speaker into a position that requires assistance, such as 'I would need to have those plans back by Friday at the latest'.

**Negotiation** Communication between two or more persons or parties that is goal-driven.

**Non-verbal communication** Any transfer of meaning that uses other vehicles to communicate than simply talk.

**Olfactics** How smell relates to our understanding and interpretation of communication.

**Participatory journalism** The ability of any member of a given community to collect and transfer news and other forms of public information.

**Permission directive** A request that is formed by asking as if for permission, such as 'Could I please borrow the files on that merger?'.

**Political correctness** The attitude that various forms of communication should not be offensive to single or multiple social groupings, such as race, gender, age, religion, etc.

**Polychronic culture** A culture type that allows for flexibility of specific schedules, sequential task achievements, and deadlines; often polychronic cultures emphasize the past.

**Proxemics** How people use space and distance culturally; the tolerated amount of distance between two parties in any interaction.

**Question-answer sequence** A basic form of turntaking that begins with a question and is followed by an answer to that question.

**Question directive** A request type that is formed by using a question, such as 'Can we set the agenda for tomorrow morning?'.

**Subculture** A group or members of a group found within the larger context of a culture, and who further share characteristics unique to that group, such as the elderly, university students, or human resource managers.

**Third Culture Kids (TCKs)** People who have grown up in a culture or cultures other than the original culture of their parents; often TCKs do not identify with only one culture but rather feel that they are members of multiple cultures or none at all.

**Turntaking** The basic organization of verbal communication between at least two parties or individuals.

**Value orientations** How members of a culture display their attitudes towards various social and moral values such as ethics, orientation to wealth, or the value of human life.

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**Prof. Dr. Nils Bickhoff** holds an M.Sc. and a Ph.D. in business administration and began his career as a consultant with Roland Berger Strategy Consultants in 1995. He advised international clients on matters of strategy, organization, branding, and corporate finance, and was also responsible for Roland Berger's global research & development activities. In 2005 he founded his own company and has since been advising top managers on all issues of strategic management. Nils Bickhoff has authored and published several management books, is editor of the "Quintessence" series, gives lectures and seminars, and is Professor of Business Administration and Marketing at the European Distance University in Hamburg.