

Communicating Across Cultures



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OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize the cultural variables in the communication process and what factors can cause “noise” in that process.
2. To develop an awareness of differences in non-verbal behaviors, context, and attitudes and how they affect cross-cultural communication.
3. To understand the complexities of Western-Arab communications.
4. To be aware of the impact of IT on cross-border communications.
5. To learn how to successfully manage cross-cultural business communications.

OPENING PROFILE: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GLOBAL BUSINESS

... it's becoming more and more evident to enterprises that the social web actually does make sense for businesses.¹

K. ANANTH KRISHNAN (TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES)
April 27, 2011.

BNP Paribas, the French bank, launched its Facebook and Twitter sites in 2010 and has one of the largest followings, with about 120,000 Facebook "fans."²

FINANCIAL TIMES,
January 10, 2011.

Managers in international business or non-profit enterprises around the world are grappling with the question of how to benefit from the burgeoning use of social media networks—through the Internet, video, audio, and phone—both external and internal to the organization. The networks, such as Facebook, are directly and indirectly linking people and business around the world. (Facebook, for example, had 1 billion monthly users as of October 2012; 81 percent of users are outside the U.S. and Canada. If Facebook were a country it would be the third most populous country in the world). The power of such linkages for political and social motives was made clear during the “Arab Spring” in 2011, started by one person in Egypt protesting the government through the use of YouTube, iPhones, and other media.

Global business managers are realizing that these social media are potential sources of rich information, outside the normal chain of communication, that their companies could use to find out more about what customers want, how new ideas might be received, what competitors are doing, what problems might be lurking and how to deal with them, and so on. As an example, K. Ananth Krishnan, the chief technology officer (CTO) of Tata Consultancy Services, observed in an interview that “Increasingly, data is coming at businesses in *unstructured ways*. It’s coming from outside of companies, in the kinds of networking and SMS messaging habits that customers have. And it’s coming from unstructured sources *inside* companies, from in-house blogs to internal knowledge markets.”³ (Tata Consultancy Services, based in India, has 198,000 IT consultants in 42 countries.) Krishnan notes, however, that concerns about privacy of information gathered through such sources must be taken into account.

Another challenge to the effective use of social media is how to measure the effectiveness of each source as a benefit to the company, given the considerable investment their use would require. Firms such as Target, Dell, and Burger King are trying to find what works best for them as social media applications such as Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs, microblogs such as Twitter, etc., have changed the way consumers interact with companies and friends about brands and services—with both positive and negative feedback.⁴

39 percent of companies we’ve surveyed already use social-media services as their primary digital tool to reach customers, and that percentage is expected to rise to 47 percent within the next four years.

McKINSEY QUARTERLY,
April 2012.⁵

FIGURE 4-1 Social Media



Source: Anatolii Babii/Alamy

(Continued)

While many companies are trying out social media to market their products or services and to get feedback, others feel that the audience is too general and does not work as well as being able to target their message to specific demographic markets.⁶

Regardless of how companies interact with and use social media networks, it is clear that they are here to stay, that they can have considerable impact on global businesses, and that they are impacting political and social trends as well. In China, for example, over 300 million people use social media, which is very popular because it is less likely to be monitored by the government. Years ahead of the West, with social media such as Renren and Sina Weibo, China's online users spend more than 40 percent of their time online on social media, a figure that continues to rise rapidly, according to McKinsey and Company consultants.⁷ There is no Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter. However, in spite of the complexities and challenges, the sheer numbers of users present considerable opportunity for marketing.

Cultural communications are deeper and more complex than spoken or written messages. The essence of effective cross-cultural communication has more to do with releasing the right responses than with sending the "right" messages.

HALL AND HALL⁸

Multi-local online strategy ... is about meeting global business objectives by tuning in to the cultural dynamics of their local markets.

"THINK GLOBALLY, INTERACT LOCALLY," *NEW MEDIA AGE*⁹

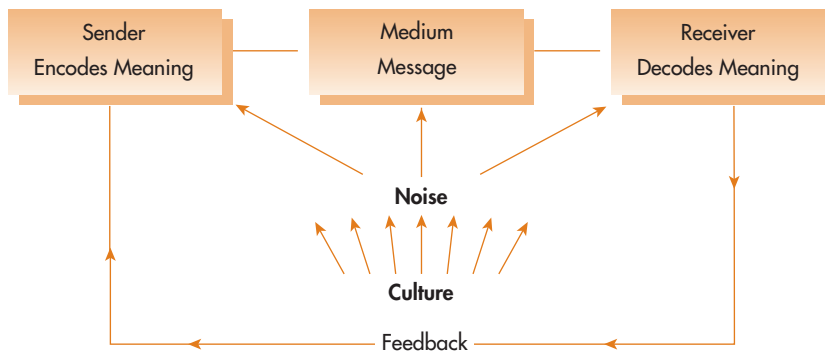
As the opening profile suggests, communication is a critical factor in the cross-cultural management issues discussed in this book, particularly those of an interpersonal nature, involving motivation, leadership, group interactions, and negotiation. Culture is conveyed and perpetuated through communication in one form or another. Culture and communication are so intricately intertwined that they are, essentially, synonymous.¹⁰ By understanding this relationship, managers can move toward constructive intercultural management. Nardon et al. point out that while global managers cite multicultural communication as a serious challenge, at the same time it can open up important sources of business opportunity. "It is through communication that relationships are formed, conflicts are resolved, and innovative ideas are created and shared."¹¹

Managers doing business around the world invariably complain that cross-cultural communication challenges have led to lost business, unintended offenses, and embarrassment—in particular in countries where it is crucial to develop relationships and trust. Communication, whether in the form of writing, talking, listening, or via the Internet, is an inherent part of a manager's role and takes up the majority of a manager's time on the job. Studies by Mintzberg demonstrate the importance of oral communication; he found that most managers spend between 50 and 90 percent of their time talking to people.¹² The ability of a manager to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries will largely determine the success of international business transactions or the output of a culturally diverse workforce. It is useful, then, to break down the elements involved in the communication process, both to understand the cross-cultural issues at stake and to maximize the opportunities to establish common meaning among the parties communicating.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The term **communication** describes the process of sharing meaning by transmitting messages through media such as words, behavior, or material artifacts. Managers communicate to coordinate activities, to disseminate information, to motivate people, and to negotiate future plans. It is of vital importance, then, for a receiver to interpret the meaning of a particular communication in the way the sender intended. Unfortunately, the communication process (see Exhibit 4-1) involves stages during which meaning can be distorted. Anything that serves to undermine the communication of the intended meaning is typically referred to as **noise**.

The primary cause of noise stems from the fact that the sender and the receiver each exist in a unique, private world thought of as her or his life space. The context of that private world, largely based on culture, experience, relations, values, and so forth, determines the interpretation of meaning in communication. People filter, or selectively understand, messages consistent with their own expectations and perceptions of reality and their values and norms of behavior.

EXHIBIT 4-1 The Communication Process

The more dissimilar the cultures of those involved, the more the likelihood of misinterpretation. In this way, as Samovar, Porter, and Jain state in their book, *Understanding Intercultural Communication*, cultural factors pervade the communication process:

*Culture not only dictates who talks with whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. In fact, our entire repertory of communicative behaviors is dependent largely on the culture in which we have been raised. Culture, consequently, is the foundation of communication. And, when cultures vary, communication practices also vary.*¹³

Communication, therefore, is a complex process of linking up or sharing the perceptual fields of sender and receiver; the perceptive sender builds a bridge to the life space of the receiver.¹⁴ After the receiver interprets the message and draws a conclusion about what the sender meant, he or she will, in most cases, encode and send back a response, making communication a circular process.

The communication process is rapidly changing, however, as a result of technological developments; therefore it is propelling global business forward at a phenomenal growth rate. These changes are discussed later in this chapter.

Cultural Noise in the Communication Process

*In Japanese there are several words for “I” and several words for “you” but their use depends on the relationship between the speaker and the other person. In short, there is no “I” by itself; the “I” depends on the relationship.*¹⁵

Because the focus in this text is on effective cross-cultural communication, it is important to understand what cultural variables cause noise in the communication process. This knowledge of **cultural noise**—the cultural variables that undermine the communication of intended meaning—will enable us to take steps to minimize that noise and so improve communication.

When a member of one culture sends a message to a member of another culture, **intercultural communication** takes place. The message contains the meaning intended by the encoder. When it reaches the receiver, however, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoder’s culture becomes part of the meaning.¹⁶ Exhibit 4-2 provides an example of intercultural communication in which the meaning got all mixed up. Note how the attribution of behavior differs for each participant. **Attribution** is the process in which people look for an explanation of another person’s behavior. When they realize that they do not understand another person, they tend, say Hall and Hall, to blame their confusion on the other’s “stupidity, deceit, or craziness.”¹⁷

In the situation depicted in Exhibit 4-2, the Indian employee becomes frustrated and resigns after experiencing communication problems with his German boss. How could this outcome have been avoided? We do not have much information about the people or the context of the situation, but we can look at some of the variables that might have been involved and use them as a basis for analysis.

THE CULTURE-COMMUNICATION LINK

The following sections examine underlying elements of culture that affect communication. The degree to which one is able to effectively communicate largely depends on how similar the other person’s cultural expectations are to our own. However, cultural gaps can be overcome by prior learning and understanding of those variables and how to adjust to them.

EXHIBIT 4-2 Cultural Noise in International Communication¹⁸

The VP for Operations of a German manufacturing company headquartered in Munich became concerned about satisfying an important client in France with an order that he had outsourced to a subsidiary in India. He decided to visit the local manager and confirm the importance of the order being on time. The following is what transpired in his interaction with the local production manager.

Behavior		Attribution	
German:	“What can be done to make sure this project is completed on time?”	German:	I am giving him some responsibility.
		Indian:	Doesn't he know what to do? He is the boss. Why is he asking me?
Indian:	“I don't know. What do you suggest?”	German:	Can't he take responsibility?
		Indian:	I asked him for instructions.
German:	“You know the scheduling and staffing situation here better than me.”	German:	I want to train him to make some decisions.
		Indian:	What kind of manager is he? Well, he expects me to say something.
Indian:	“I'll hire another worker, then we should be ready in two weeks.”	German:	One more worker is totally insufficient; he doesn't know how to schedule properly. I need a definite deadline commitment—not “should be ready.”
German:	“Hire three workers and give them a deadline of three weeks. Are we agreed on that deadline?”	German:	I offer a contract.
		Indian:	These are my orders: three weeks.
The German returned to his office in Munich, confident that the project would be completed on time and the order delivered on schedule, which he conveyed to the client. After four weeks, the customer called to complain that he had not received the order. The German VP immediately called the Indian manager:			
German:	“Why hasn't the order been sent out as we agreed?”	German:	I am holding him responsible for our agreement.
		Indian:	He wants to know why it is not ready.
Indian:	“It will be completed next week.”	(Both attribute that it is not ready.)	
German:	“But you told me it would be sent out in three weeks.”	German:	I must teach him to take responsibility for deadlines.
		Indian:	This person does not know how to manage; it was not possible to complete the project in three weeks. I am going to get another job where the boss knows how to manage!

Trust in Communication

The key ingredient in a successful alliance is trust.

JAMES R. HOUGHTON, *FORMER CHAIRMAN, CORNING, INC.*¹⁹

Effective communication, and therefore effective collaboration in alliances across national boundaries, depends on the informal understandings among the parties that are based on the trust that has developed between them. However, the meaning of trust, and how it is developed and communicated, varies across societies. In China and Japan, for example, business transactions

are based on networks of long-standing relationships based on trust rather than on the formal contracts and arm's-length relationships typical of the United States. When there is trust between parties, implicit understanding arises within communications. This understanding has numerous benefits in business, including encouraging communicators to overlook cultural differences and minimize problems. It allows communicators to adjust to unforeseen circumstances with less conflict than would be the case with formal contracts, and it facilitates open communication in exchanging ideas and information.²⁰ From his research on trust in global collaboration, John Child suggests the following guidelines for cultivating trust:

- Create a clear and calculated basis for mutual benefit. There must be realistic commitments and good intentions to honor them.
- Improve predictability: Strive to resolve conflicts and keep communication open.
- Develop mutual bonding through regular socializing and friendly contact.²¹

What can managers anticipate with regard to the level of trust in communications with people in other countries? If trust is based on how trustworthy we consider a person to be, then it must vary according to that society's expectations about whether that culture supports the norms and values that predispose people to behave credibly and benevolently. Are there differences across societies in those expectations of trust? Research on 90,000 people in 45 societies by the World Values Study Group provides some insight on cultural values regarding predisposition to trust. When we examine the percentage of respondents in each society who responded that "most people can be trusted," we can see that the Nordic countries and China had the highest predisposition to trust, followed by Canada, the United States, and Britain, while Brazil, Turkey, Romania, Slovenia, and Latvia had the lowest level of trust in people.²²

The GLOBE Project

Results from the GLOBE research on culture, discussed in Chapter 3, provide some insight into culturally appropriate communication styles and expectations for the manager to use abroad. GLOBE researchers Javidan and House make the following observations:²³ For people in societies that ranked high on performance orientation—for example, the United States—presenting objective information in a direct and explicit way is an important and expected manner of communication; this contrasts with people in Russia or Greece—societies that ranked low on performance orientation—for whom hard facts and figures are not readily available or taken seriously. In those cases, a more indirect approach is preferred. People from countries ranking low on assertiveness, such as Sweden, also recoil from explicitness; their preference is for much two-way discourse and friendly relationships.

People ranking high on the "humane" dimension, such as those from Ireland and the Philippines, make avoiding conflict a priority and tend to communicate with the goal of being supportive of people rather than of achieving objective end results. This contrasts with people from France and Spain, whose agenda is achievement of goals.

The foregoing provides examples of how to draw implications for appropriate communication styles from the research findings on cultural differences across societies. Astute global managers have learned that culture and communication are inextricably linked and that they should prepare themselves accordingly. Most will also suggest that you carefully watch and listen to how your hosts are communicating, and then follow their lead.

Cultural Variables in the Communication Process

On a different level, it is also useful to be aware of cultural variables that can affect the communication process by influencing a person's perceptions; some of these variables have been identified by Samovar and Porter and discussed by Harris and Moran, and others.²⁴ These variables are as follows: attitudes; social organization; thought patterns; roles; language (spoken or written); nonverbal communication (including kinesic behavior, proxemics, paralanguage, and object language); and time. Although these variables are discussed separately in this text, their effects are interdependent and inseparable—or, as Hecht, Andersen, and Ribeau put it, "Encoders and decoders process nonverbal cues as a conceptual, multichanneled gestalt."²⁵ As you read the explanations of these variables in the discussion that follows, consider how they apply in the context of communicating and managing in India, as outlined in the nearby feature, *Under the Lens: Communicating in India—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette*.



UNDER THE LENS

Communicating in India—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette

FACTS AND STATISTICS

Location: Southern Asia, bordering Bangladesh, 4,053 km; Bhutan, 605 km; Burma, 1,463 km; China, 3,380 km; Nepal, 1,690 km; and Pakistan, 2,912 km

Capital: New Delhi

Climate: varies from tropical monsoon in south to temperate in north

Population: 1,065,070,607 (July 2004, est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Indo-Aryan, 72%; Dravidian, 25%; Mongoloid and other, 3% (2000)

Religions: Hindu, 81.3%; Muslim, 12%; Christian, 2.3%;

Sikh, 1.9%; other groups including

Buddhist, Jain, and Parsi, 2.5% (2000)

Government: federal republic

FIGURE 4-2 Map of India



Source: © Dorling Kindersley/Dorling Kindersley Limited

FIGURE 4-3 Indian Flag

Source: Malgorzata Kistryn/Fotolia LLC

LANGUAGES IN INDIA

The different states of India have different official languages, some of them not recognized by the central government. Some states have more than one official language. Bihar in east India has three official languages—Hindi, Urdu and Bengali—that are all recognized by the central government. But Sikkim, also in east India, has four official languages, of which only Nepali is recognized by the central government. Besides the languages officially recognized by central or state governments, there are other languages that don't have this recognition, and their speakers are waging political struggles to obtain this recognition. The central government decided that Hindi was to be the official language of India, and therefore it also has the status of official language in the states.

You can learn some useful Hindi phrases by visiting <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/language/hindi-phrases.html>.

INDIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Hierarchy

- The influences of Hinduism and the tradition of the caste system have created a culture that emphasizes established hierarchical relationships.
- Indians are always conscious of social order and their status relative to other people, be they family, friends, or strangers.
- All relationships involve hierarchies. In schools, teachers are called *gurus* and are viewed as the source of all knowledge. The patriarch, usually the father, is considered the leader of the family. The boss is seen as the source of ultimate responsibility in business. Every relationship has a clear-cut hierarchy that must be observed for the social order to be maintained.

The Role of the Family

- People typically define themselves by the groups to which they belong rather than by their status as individuals. Someone is deemed to be affiliated to a specific state, region, city, family, career path, religion, etc.
- This group orientation stems from the close personal ties Indians maintain with their family, including the extended family.
- The extended family creates a myriad of interrelationships, rules, and structures. Along with these mutual obligations comes a deep-rooted trust among relatives.

(Continued)

FIGURE 4-4 The Taj Mahal

Source: olgagomenyuk/Fotolia LLC

Just Can't Say No

- Indians do not like to express “no,” be it verbally or non-verbally.
- Rather than disappoint you, for example, by saying something isn’t available, Indians will offer you the response that they think you want to hear.
- This behaviour should not be considered dishonest. An Indian would be considered terribly rude if he did not attempt to give a person what had been asked.
- Since they do not like to give negative answers, Indians may give an affirmative answer but be deliberately vague about any specific details. This will require you to look for non-verbal cues, such as a reluctance to commit to an actual time for a meeting or an enthusiastic response.

Etiquette and Customs in India

Meeting Etiquette:

- Religion, education, and social class all influence greetings in India.
- This is a hierarchical culture, so greet the eldest or most senior person first.
- When leaving a group, each person must be bid farewell individually.
- Shaking hands is common, especially in the large cities among the more educated who are accustomed to dealing with Westerners.
- Men may shake hands with other men and women may shake hands with other women; however, there are seldom handshakes between men and women because of religious beliefs. If you are uncertain, wait for them to extend their hand.

Naming Conventions

Indian names vary based upon religion, social class, and region of the country. The following are some basic guidelines to understanding the naming conventions:

Hindus:

- In the north, many people have both a given name and a surname.
- In the south, surnames are less common and a person generally uses the initial of their father’s name in front of their own name.
- The man’s formal name is their name “s/o” (son of) and the father’s name. Women use “d/o” to refer to themselves as the daughter of their father.
- At marriage, women drop their father’s name and use their first name with their husband’s first name as a sort of surname.

Muslims:

- Many Muslims do not have surnames. Instead, men add the father’s name to their own name with the connector “bin.” So, “Abdullah bin Ahmed” is “Abdullah, the son of Ahmed.”

- Women use the connector “binti.”
- The title Hajji (m) or Hajjah (f) before the name indicates the person has made their pilgrimage to Mecca.

Sikhs:

- Sikhs all use the name “Singh.” It is either adopted as a surname or as a connector name to the surname.

Gift-Giving Etiquette

- Indians believe that giving gifts eases the transition into the next life.
- Gifts of cash are given to friends and members of the extended family to celebrate life events such as birth, death, and marriage.
- It is not the value of the gift, but the sincerity with which it is given, that is important to the recipient.
- If invited to an Indian’s home for a meal, it is not necessary to bring a gift, although one will not be turned down.
- Do not give frangipani or white flowers, because they are used at funerals.
- Yellow, green, and red are lucky colors, so try to use them to wrap gifts.
- A gift from a man should be said to come from both he and his wife, mother, sister, or some other female relative.
- Hindus should not be given gifts made of leather.
- Muslims should not be given gifts made of pigskin or alcoholic products.
- Gifts are not opened when received.

Dining Etiquette

- Indians entertain in their homes, restaurants, private clubs, or other public venues, depending upon the occasion and circumstances.
- Although Indians are not always punctual themselves, they expect foreigners to arrive close to the appointed time.
- Take off your shoes before entering the house.
- Dress modestly and conservatively.
- Politely turn down the first offer of tea, coffee, or snacks. You will be asked again and again. Saying no to the first invitation is part of the protocol.

There are diverse dietary restrictions in India, and these may affect the foods that are served:

- Hindus do not eat beef, and many are vegetarians.
- Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol.
- Sikhs do not eat beef.
- Lamb, chicken, and fish are the most commonly served main courses for non-vegetarian meals, because they avoid the meat restrictions of the religious groups.

Table manners are somewhat formal, but this formality is tempered by the religious beliefs of the various groups.

- Much Indian food is eaten with the fingers.
- Wait to be told where to sit.
- If utensils are used, they are generally a tablespoon and a fork.
- Guests are often served in a particular order: the guest of honour is served first, followed by the men, and the children are served last. Women typically serve the men and eat later.
- You may be asked to wash your hands before and after sitting down to a meal.
- Always use your right hand to eat, whether you are using utensils or your fingers.
- In some situations food may be put on your plate for you, while in other situations you may be allowed to serve yourself from a communal bowl.
- Leaving a small amount of food on your plate indicates that you are satisfied. Finishing all your food means that you are still hungry.

(Continued)

Business Etiquette and Protocol in India

Relationships and Communication:

- Indians prefer to do business with those they know.
- Relationships are built upon mutual trust and respect.
- In general, Indians prefer to have long-standing personal relationships prior to doing business.
- It may be a good idea to go through a third-party introduction. This gives you immediate credibility.

Business Meeting Etiquette

- If you will be traveling to India from abroad, it is advisable to make appointments by letter, at least one month and preferably two months in advance.
- It is a good idea to confirm your appointment, because they do get cancelled at short notice.
- The best time for a meeting is late morning or early afternoon. Reconfirm your meeting the week before and call again that morning, since it is common for meetings to be cancelled at the last minute.
- Keep your schedule flexible so that it can be adjusted for last-minute rescheduling of meetings.
- You should arrive at meetings on time, since Indians are impressed with punctuality.
- Meetings will start with a great deal of getting-to-know-you talk. In fact, it is quite possible that no business will be discussed at the first meeting.
- Always send a detailed agenda in advance. Send back-up materials, charts, and other data as well. This allows everyone to review and become comfortable with the material prior to the meeting.
- Follow up a meeting with an overview of what was discussed and the next steps.

Business Negotiating

- Indians are non-confrontational. It is rare for them to overtly disagree, although this is beginning to change in the managerial ranks.
- Decisions are reached by the person with the most authority.
- Decision making is a slow process.
- If you lose your temper, you lose face and prove you are unworthy of respect and trust.
- Delays are to be expected, especially when dealing with the government.
- Most Indians expect concessions in both price and terms. It is acceptable to expect concessions in return for those you grant.
- Never appear overly legalistic during negotiations. In general, Indians do not trust the legal system and someone's word is sufficient to reach an agreement.
- Do not disagree publicly with members of your negotiating team.
- Successful negotiations are often celebrated by a meal.

Dress Etiquette

- Business attire is conservative.
- Men should wear dark-colored conservative business suits.
- Women should dress conservatively in suits or dresses.
- The weather often determines clothing. In the hotter parts of the country, dress is less formal, although dressing as suggested above for the first meeting will indicate respect.

Titles

- Indians revere titles such as Professor, Doctor, and Engineer.
- Status is determined by age, university degree, caste, and profession.
- If someone does not have a professional title, use the honorific title "Sir" or "Madam."
- Titles are used with the person's name or the surname, depending upon the person's name. (See Social Etiquette for more information on Indian naming conventions.)
- Wait to be invited before using someone's first name without the title.

Business Cards

- Business cards are exchanged after the initial handshake and greeting.
- If you have a university degree or any honour, put it on your business card.
- Use the right hand to give and receive business cards.
- Business cards need not be translated into Hindi.
- Always present your business card so the recipient may read the card as it is handed to them.

Source: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/India-country-profile.html>, September 5, 2011. Used with permission of www.kwintessential.co.uk.

ATTITUDES

We all know that our attitudes underlie the way we behave and communicate and the way we interpret messages from others. Ethnocentric attitudes are a particular source of noise in cross-cultural communication. In the incident described in Exhibit 4-2, both the Indian and the German are clearly attempting to interpret and convey meaning based on their own experiences of that kind of transaction. The German is probably guilty of stereotyping the Indian employee by quickly jumping to the conclusion that he is unwilling to take responsibility for the task and the scheduling.

This problem, **stereotyping**, occurs when a person assumes that every member of a society or subculture has the same characteristics or traits. Stereotyping is a common cause of misunderstanding in intercultural communication. It is an arbitrary, lazy, and often destructive way to find out about people. Astute managers are aware of the dangers of cultural stereotyping and deal with each person as an individual with whom they may form a unique relationship.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Our perceptions can be influenced by differences in values, approach, or priorities relative to the kind of social organizations to which we belong. These organizations may be based on one's nation, tribe, or religious sect, or they may consist of the members of a certain profession. Examples of such organizations include the Academy of Management or the United Auto Workers (UAW).²⁶

THOUGHT PATTERNS

The logical progression of reasoning varies widely around the world and greatly affects the communication process. Managers cannot assume that others use the same reasoning processes, as illustrated by the experience of a Canadian expatriate in Thailand, related in a book by Harris and Moran:

While in Thailand a Canadian expatriate's car was hit by a Thai motorist who had crossed over the double line while passing another vehicle. After failing to establish that the fault lay with the Thai driver, the Canadian flagged down a policeman. After several minutes of seemingly futile discussion, the Canadian pointed out the double line in the middle of the road and asked the policeman directly, "What do these lines signify?" The policeman replied, "They indicate the center of the road and are there so I can establish just how far the accident is from that point." The Canadian was silent. It had never occurred to him that the double line might not mean "no passing allowed."²⁷

In the Exhibit 4-2 scenario, perhaps the German did not realize that the Indian employee had a different rationale for his time estimate for the job. Because the Indian was not used to having to estimate schedules, he just took a guess, which he felt he had been forced to do.

ROLES

Societies differ considerably in their perceptions of a manager's role. Much of the difference is attributable to their perceptions of who should make the decisions and who has responsibility for what. In the Exhibit 4-2 example, the German assumes that his role as manager is to delegate responsibility, to foster autonomy, and to practice participative management. He prescribes the role of the employee without any consideration of whether the employee will understand that

role. The Indian's frame of reference leads him to think that the manager is the boss and should give the order about when to have the job completed. He interprets the German's behavior as breaking that frame of reference, and therefore he feels that the boss is "stupid and incompetent" for giving him the wrong order and for not recognizing and appreciating his accomplishments. The manager should have considered what behaviors Indian workers would expect of him and then either should have played that role or discussed the situation carefully, in a training mode.

LANGUAGE

Spoken or written language, of course, is a frequent cause of miscommunication, stemming from a person's inability to speak the local language, a poor or too-literal translation, a speaker's failure to explain idioms, or a person missing the meaning conveyed through body language or certain symbols. Even among countries that share the same language, problems can arise from the subtleties and nuances inherent in the use of the language, as noted by George Bernard Shaw: "Britain and America are two nations separated by a common language." This problem can exist even within the same country among different subcultures or subgroups.²⁸

Many international executives tell stories about lost business deals or lost sales because of communication blunders:

When Pepsi Cola's slogan "Come Alive with Pepsi" was introduced in Germany, the company learned that the literal German translation of "come alive" is "come out of the grave."

A U.S. airline found a lack of demand for its "rendezvous lounges" on its Boeing 747s. They later learned that "rendezvous" in Portuguese refers to a room that is rented for prostitution.²⁹

More than just conveying objective information, language also conveys cultural and social understandings from one generation to the next. Examples of how language reflects what is important in a society include the 6,000 different Arabic words used to describe camels and their parts and the 50 or more classifications of snow used by the Inuit, the Eskimo people of Canada.

Inasmuch as language conveys culture, technology, and priorities, it also serves to separate and perpetuate subcultures. In India, 14 official and many unofficial languages are used, and over 800 languages are spoken on the African continent.

Because of increasing workforce diversity around the world, the international business manager will have to deal with a medley of languages. For example, assembly-line workers at the Ford plant in Cologne, Germany, speak Turkish and Spanish as well as German. In Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, many of the buyers and traders are Chinese. Not all Arabs speak Arabic; in Tunisia and Lebanon, for example, French is the language of commerce.

International managers need either a good command of the local language or competent interpreters. The task of accurate translation to bridge cultural gaps is fraught with difficulties: Joe Romano, a partner of High Ground, an emerging technology-marketing company in Boston, found out on a business trip to Taiwan how close a one-syllable slip of the tongue can come to torpedoing a deal. He noted that one is supposed to say to the chief executive "Au-ban," meaning "Hello, No. 1. Boss." But instead he accidentally said "Lau-ban ya," which means "Hello, wife of the boss." Essentially Mr. Romano called him a woman in front of twenty senior Taiwanese executives, who all laughed; but the boss was very embarrassed, because men in Asia have a very macho attitude.³⁰

Even the direct translation of specific words does not guarantee the congruence of their meaning, as with the word "yes" used by Asians, which usually means only that they have heard you, and, often, that they are too polite to disagree. The Chinese, for example, through years of political control, have built into their communication culture a cautionary stance to avoid persecution by professing agreement with whatever opinion was held by the person questioning them.³¹

Sometimes even a direct statement can be misinterpreted instead as an indirect expression, as when a German businessman said to his Algerian counterpart, "My wife would love something like that beautiful necklace your wife was wearing last night. It was beautiful." The next day the Algerian gave him a box with the necklace in it as a gift to his wife. The Algerian had interpreted the compliment as an indirect way of expressing a wish to possess a similar necklace. The German was embarrassed, but had to accept the necklace. He realized he needed to be careful how he expressed such things in the future—such as asking where that kind of jewelry is sold.³²

In much of the world, politeness and a desire to say only what the listener wants to hear create noise in the communication process. Often, even a clear translation does not help a person to understand what is meant because the encoding process has obscured the true message. With

the poetic Arab language—replete with exaggeration, elaboration, and repetition—meaning is attributed more to how something is said rather than to what is actually said.

For the German supervisor and Indian employee cited in Exhibit 4-2, it is highly likely that the German could have picked up some cues from the employee's body language that probably implied problems with the interpretation of meaning. How might body language have created noise in this case?

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

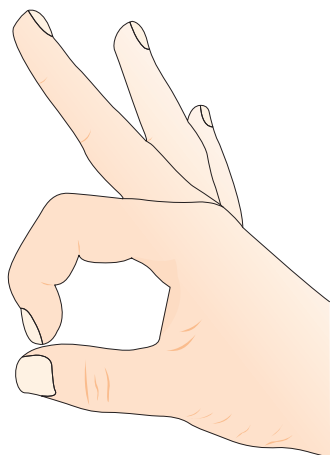
Clearly, as explained by Roger Axtel in his book, “Essential Do's and Taboos,”³³ this non-verbal signal (shown in figure 4-5 below) is absolutely not “O.K.” in many countries. Axtel gives the example of when Vice President Richard Nixon flew to Brazil in an attempt to improve relations between the two countries. As reported in the newspapers, when Nixon stepped off the plane in Sao Paulo, he gave the “A-O.K.” sign—with both hands! The crowd at the airport booed—of course—given the meaning in Brazil (a private part of a woman's body); not surprisingly, photos of this incident were in the paper the next day!

Behavior that communicates without words (although it often is accompanied by words) is called **nonverbal communication**. People will usually believe what they see over what they hear—hence the expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Studies show that these subtle messages account for between 65 and 93 percent of interpreted communication.³⁴ Even minor variations in body language, speech rhythms, and punctuality, for example, often cause mistrust and misperception of the situation among cross-national parties.³⁵ The media for such nonverbal communication can be categorized into four types: (1) kinesic behavior, (2) proxemics, (3) paralanguage, and (4) object language.

The term **kinesic behavior** refers to communication through body movements—posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Although such actions may be universal, often their meaning is not. Because kinesic systems of meaning are culturally specific and learned, they cannot be generalized across cultures. Most people in the West would not correctly interpret many Chinese facial expressions; for example, sticking out the tongue expresses surprise, a widening of the eyes shows anger, and scratching the ears and cheeks indicates happiness.³⁶ Research has shown for some time, however, that most people worldwide can recognize displays of the basic emotions of anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, and contempt.³⁷

As illustrated previously, visitors to other countries must be careful about their gestures and how they might be interpreted. For example, people in Japan may point with their middle finger, which is considered an obscene gesture to others. To Arabs, showing the soles of one's feet is an insult; recall the reporter who threw his shoe at President Bush in late 2008 during his visit to Iraq. This was, to Arabs, the ultimate insult.

FIGURE 4-5 Cultural Interpretation of Gestures



United States: “A-O.K.”
 France: “Zero” or “worthless”
 Japan: Symbol for money

Many businesspeople and visitors react negatively to what they feel are inappropriate facial expressions, without understanding the cultural meaning behind them. In his studies of cross-cultural negotiations, Graham observed that the Japanese feel uncomfortable when faced with the Americans' eye-to-eye posture. They are taught since childhood to bow their heads out of humility, whereas the automatic response of Americans is "look at me when I'm talking to you!"³⁸

Subtle differences in eye behavior (called *oculesics*) can throw off a communication badly if they are not understood. Eye behavior includes differences not only in eye contact but also in the use of eyes to convey other messages, whether or not that involves mutual gaze. For example, during speech, Americans will look straight at you, but the British keep your attention by looking away. The British will look at you when they have finished speaking, which signals that it is your turn to talk. The implicit rationale for this is that you can't interrupt people when they are not looking at you.³⁹

It is helpful for U.S. managers to be aware of the many cultural expectations regarding posture and how they may be interpreted. In Europe or Asia, a relaxed posture in business meetings may be taken as bad manners or the result of poor upbringing. In Korea, you are expected to sit upright, with feet squarely on the floor, and to speak slowly, showing a blending of body and spirit.

Proxemics deals with the influence of proximity and space on communication—both personal space and office space or layout. Americans expect office layouts to provide private space for each person, and usually a larger and more private space as one goes up the hierarchy. In much of Asia, the custom is open office space, with people at all levels working and talking in close proximity to one another. Space communicates power in both Germany and the United States, evidenced by the desire for a corner office or one on the top floor. The importance of French officials, however, is made clear by a position in the middle of subordinates, communicating that they have a central position in an information network, where they can stay informed and in control.⁴⁰ The following Under the Lens feature illustrates the connections between beliefs about the variables of proxemics and business decisions.

Do you ever feel vaguely uncomfortable and start moving backward slowly when someone is speaking to you? This is because that person is invading your "bubble"—your personal space. Personal space is culturally patterned, and foreign spatial cues are a common source of



UNDER THE LENS

How Feng Shui Affects Business

Feng Shui (pronounced "fung shway") is an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics believed to use the laws of both heaven and earth to help one improve life by receiving positive *qi*. Feng shui translates into English as "wind-water."⁴¹ *Qi* (pronounced "chee" in English) is "a movable positive or negative life force which plays an essential role in feng shui."⁴²

Throughout history, Asian experts have read these energy patterns and how to benefit by facing their buildings and offices in a particular direction, by designing gardens and entrances in a positive way, and by using *Qi* in rooms to influence aspects in an individual's life. "The quality of *Qi* is expressed through form, shape, color, direction, time, and the feeling it generates within us."⁴³ Various methods to establish beneficial settings have included compass directions, dowsing (commonly known as using a rod to move over the earth to try to find underground water or buried metals, etc.), and geomancy (loosely referred to as attempting to interpret meanings from patterns or markings in the soil or sand).

Feng shui is also used by Westerners and is often used in the process of building or decorating offices and homes—though not always following expert advice. When Donald Trump lost some important Asian clients due to his properties' apparently bad feng shui, he hired a feng shui master to analyze the auspiciousness of Trump Towers. In fact, feng shui and other beliefs from Chinese culture can drastically influence business deals. Michael Rudder, a real-estate broker in New York, found this out the hard way and now integrates feng shui in his planning—especially since most of his recent sales of office buildings and condominiums have been to Asians.⁴⁴ Also, as found by many others involved in real-estate, certain numbers have specific meanings in different cultures. In Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, for example, the pronunciation of the number four sounds the same as the word for death. No wonder many buildings in Asia do not have a fourth floor. And in Chinese, the number eight is a homophone for the word for getting rich. The eighth floor, and building numbers with eights in them, often sell at a premium.⁴⁵

misinterpretation. When someone seems aloof or pushy, it often means that she or he is operating under subtly different spatial rules.

Hall and Hall suggest that cultural differences affect the programming of the senses and that space, perceived by all the senses, is regarded as a form of territory to be protected.⁴⁶ South Americans, Southern and Eastern Europeans, Indonesians, and Arabs are **high-contact cultures**, preferring to stand close, touch a great deal, and experience a “close” sensory involvement. Latin Americans, for example, have a highly physical greeting such as putting their arms around a colleague’s back and grabbing him by the arm. On the other hand, North Americans, Asians, and Northern Europeans are **low-contact cultures** and prefer much less sensory involvement, standing farther apart and touching far less. They have a “distant” style of body language. In France, a relationship-oriented culture, good friends greet members of the opposite sex with a peck on each cheek; a handshake is a way to make a personal connection.

Interestingly, high-contact cultures are mostly located in warmer climates, and low-contact cultures in cooler climates. Americans are relatively nontouching, automatically standing at a distance so that an outstretched arm will touch the other person’s ear. Standing any closer than that is regarded as invading intimate space. However, Americans and Canadians certainly expect a warm handshake and maybe a pat on the back from closer friends, though not the very warm double handshake of the Spaniards (clasping the forearm with the left hand). The Japanese, considerably less **haptic** (touching), do not shake hands; an initial greeting between a Japanese businessperson and a Spanish businessperson would be uncomfortable for both parties if they were untrained in cultural haptics. The Japanese bow to one another—the depth of the bow revealing their relative social standing.

Imagine the smartphone app that would ask your identity, the identity of the other greeter, where you both are and how many times you have greeted each other. It would then propose a compromise—a namaste followed by a handshake, perhaps, or a bow punctuated by a slap on the back.⁴⁷

When considering high- and low-contact cultures, we can trace a correlation between Hofstede’s cultural variables of individualism and collectivism and the types of kinesic and proxemic behaviors people display. Generally, people from individualistic cultures are more remote and distant, whereas those from collectivist cultures are interdependent: They tend to work, play, live, and sleep in close proximity.⁴⁸

The term **paralanguage** refers to how something is said rather than the content—i.e., the rate of speech, the tone and inflection of voice, other noises, laughing, or yawning. The culturally aware manager learns how to interpret subtle differences in paralanguage, including silence. Silence is a powerful communicator. It may be a way of saying “no,” of being offended, or of waiting for more information to make a decision. There is considerable variation in the use of silence in meetings. While Americans get uncomfortable after 10 or 15 seconds of silence, Chinese prefer to think the situation over for 30 seconds before speaking. The typical scenario between Americans and Chinese, then, is that the American gets impatient, says something to break the silence, and offends the Chinese by interrupting his or her chain of thought and comfort level with the subject.⁴⁹

The term **object language**, or **material culture**, refers to how we communicate through material artifacts, whether architecture, office design and furniture, clothing, cars, or cosmetics. Material culture communicates what people hold as important. In the United States, for example, someone wishing to convey his important status and wealth would show guests his penthouse office or expensive car. In Japan and China a businessman presents his business card to a new contact and expects the receiver to study it and appreciate his position. The cards are called “name cards” in China and are an essential aspect of doing business—a way to build networks. The exchange of cards occurs as soon as you meet, and visitors should be careful to get an appropriate translation for their cards.⁵⁰ In Mexico, a visiting international executive or salesperson is advised to take time out, before negotiating business, to show appreciation for the surrounding architecture, which is prized by Mexicans. The importance of family to people in Spain and much of Latin America would be conveyed by family photographs around the office, and therefore an expectation that the visitor would enquire about the family.

TIME

Another variable that communicates culture is the way people regard and use time (see also Chapter 3). To Brazilians, relative punctuality communicates the level of importance of those involved. To Middle Easterners, time is something controlled by the will of Allah.

To initiate effective cross-cultural business interactions, managers should know the difference between *monochronic time systems* and *polychronic time systems* and how they affect communications. Hall and Hall explain that in **monochronic cultures** (Switzerland, Germany, and the United States), time is experienced in a linear way, with a past, a present, and a future, and time is treated as something to be spent, saved, made up, or wasted. Classified and compartmentalized, time serves to order life. This attitude is a learned part of Western culture, probably starting with the Industrial Revolution. Monochronic people, found in individualistic cultures, generally concentrate on one thing at a time, adhere to time commitments, and are accustomed to short-term relationships.

In contrast, **polychronic cultures** tolerate many things occurring simultaneously and emphasize involvement with people. Two Latin friends, for example, will put an important conversation ahead of being on time for a business meeting, thus communicating the priority of relationships over material systems. Polychronic people—Latin Americans, Arabs, and those from other collectivist cultures—may focus on several things at once, be highly distractible, and change plans often.⁵¹

The relationship between time and space also affects communication. Polychronic people, for example, are likely to hold open meetings, moving around and conducting transactions with one party and then another, rather than compartmentalizing meeting topics, as do monochronic people.

The nuances and distinctions regarding cultural differences in nonverbal communication are endless. The various forms are listed in Exhibit 4-3; wise intercultural managers will take careful account of the role that such differences might play.

What aspects of nonverbal communication might have created noise in the interactions between the German supervisor and the Indian employee in Exhibit 4-2? Undoubtedly, some cues could have been picked up from the kinesic behavior of each person. It was the responsibility of the manager, in particular, to notice any indications from the Indian that could have prompted him to change his communication pattern or assumptions. Face-to-face communication permits the sender of the message to get immediate feedback, both verbal and nonverbal, and thus to have some idea as to how that message is being received and whether additional information is needed. What aspects of the Indian employee's kinesic behavior or paralanguage might have been evident to a more culturally sensitive manager? Did both parties' sense of time affect the communication process?

Context

East Asians live in relatively complex social networks with prescribed role relations; attention to context is, therefore, important for their effective functioning. In contrast, westerners live in less constraining social worlds that stress independence and allow them to pay less attention to context.

RICHARD E. NISBETT.⁵²

EXHIBIT 4-3 Forms of Nonverbal Communication

- Facial expressions
- Body posture
- Gestures with hands, arms, head, etc.
- Interpersonal distance (proxemics)
- Touching, body contact
- Eye contact
- Clothing, cosmetics, hairstyles, jewelry
- Paralanguage (voice pitch and inflections, rate of speech, and silence)
- Color symbolism
- Attitude toward time and the use of time in business and social interactions
- Food symbolism and social use of meals

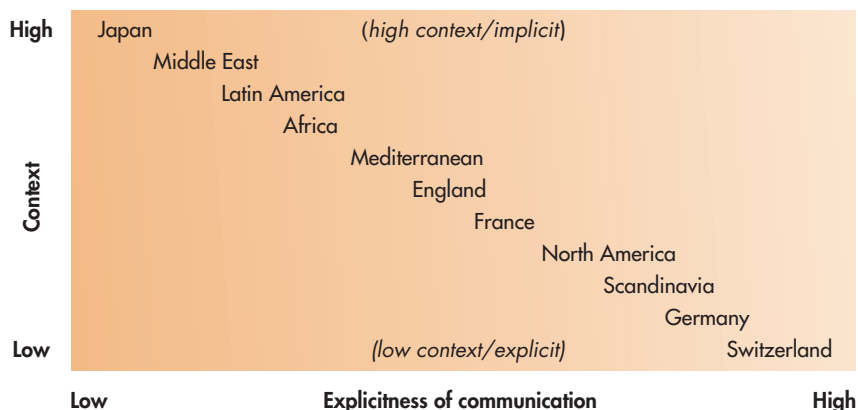
A major differentiating factor that is a primary cause of noise in the communication process is that of context—which actually incorporates many of the variables discussed earlier. The **context** in which the communication takes place affects the meaning and interpretation of the interaction. Cultures are known to be high- or low-context cultures, with a relative range in between.⁵³ In **high-context cultures** (Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean), feelings and thoughts are not explicitly expressed; instead, one has to read between the lines and interpret meaning from one's general understanding. Two such high-context cultures are the South Korea and Arab cultures. In such cultures, key information is embedded in the context rather than made explicit. People make assumptions about what the message means through their knowledge of the person or the surroundings. In these cultures, most communication takes place within a context of extensive information networks resulting from close personal relationships. See the following Management Focus for further explanation of the Asian communication style.

In **low-context cultures** (Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and North America), where personal and business relationships are more compartmentalized, communication media have to be more explicit. Feelings and thoughts are expressed in words, and information is more readily available. Westerners focus more on the individual, and therefore tend to view events as the result of specific agents, while Easterners view events in a broader and longer-term context.⁵⁴

In cross-cultural communication between high- and low-context people, a lack of understanding may preclude reaching a solution, and conflict may arise. Germans, for example, will expect considerable detailed information before making a business decision, whereas Arabs will base their decisions more on knowledge of the people involved—the information is present, but it is implicit. People in low-context cultures, such as those in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States, convey their thoughts and plans in a direct, straightforward communication style, saying something like “we have to make a decision on this today.” People in high-context cultures, such as in Asia, and, to a lesser extent, in England, convey their thoughts in a more indirect, implicit manner; this means that someone from Germany needs to have more patience and tact and be willing to listen and watch for clues—verbal and nonverbal—as to their colleagues' wishes.

People in high-context cultures expect others to understand unarticulated moods, subtle gestures, and environmental clues that people from low-context cultures simply do not process. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding often result.⁵⁵ People from high-context cultures perceive those from low-context cultures as too talkative, too obvious, and redundant. Those from low-context cultures perceive high-context people as nondisclosing, sneaky, and mysterious. Research indicates, for example, that Americans find talkative people more attractive, whereas the Koreans—a high-context people—perceive less-verbal people as more attractive. (These conflicts are illustrated in the accompanying Management in Action feature. Finding the right balance between low- and high-context communications can be tricky, as Hall and Hall point out: “Too much information leads people to feel they are being talked down to; too little information can mystify them or make them feel left out.”⁵⁶ Exhibit 4-4 shows the relative level of context in various countries.

EXHIBIT 4-4 Cultural Context and Its Effects on Communication





MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

Oriental Poker Face: Eastern Deception or Western Inscrutability?

Among many English expressions that are likely to offend those of us whose ancestry may be traced to the Far East, two stand out quite menacingly for me: “Oriental poker face” and “idiotic Asian smile.” The former refers to the supposedly inscrutable nature of a facial expression that apparently reflects no particular state of mind, while the latter pokes fun at a face fixed with a perpetually friendly smile. Westerners’ perplexity, when faced with either, arises from the impression that these two diametrically opposed masquerading strategies prevent them from extracting useful information—at least the type of information that at least they could process with a reasonable measure of confidence—about the feelings of the person before them. An Asian face that projects no signs of emotion, then, seems to most Westerners nothing but a facade. It does not matter whether that face wears an unsightly scowl or a shining ray; a facial expression they cannot interpret poses a genuine threat.

Compassionate and sympathetic to their perplexity as I may be, I am also insulted by the Western insensitivity to the significant roles that subtle signs play in Asian cultures. Every culture has its unique *modus operandi* for communication. Western culture, for example, apparently emphasizes the importance of direct communication. Not only are the communicators taught to look directly at each other when they convey a message, but they also are encouraged to come right to the point of the message. Making bold statements or asking frank questions in a less than diplomatic manner (i.e., “That was really a very stupid thing to do!” or “Are you interested in me?”) is rarely construed as rude or indiscreet. Even embarrassingly blunt questions such as “President Clinton, did you have sexual intercourse with Monica Lewinsky?” are tolerated most of the time. Asians, on the other hand, find this direct communicative communication style quite unnerving. In many social interactions, they avoid direct eye contact. They “see” each other without necessarily looking directly at each other, and they gather information about inner states of mind without asking even the most discreet or understated questions. Many times they talk around the main topic, and, yet, they succeed remarkably well in understanding one another’s position. (At least they believe they have developed a reasonably clear understanding.)

To a great extent, Asian communication is listening-centered; the ability to listen (and a special talent for detecting various communicative cues) is treated as equally important as, if not more important than, the ability to speak. This contrasts clearly with the American style of communication that puts the utmost emphasis on verbal expression; the speaker carries most of the burden for ensuring that everyone understands his or her message. An Asian listener, however, is prone to blame himself or herself for failing to reach a comprehensive understanding from the few words and gestures performed by the speaker. With this heavier burden placed on the listener, an Asian speaker does not feel obliged to send clearly discernible message cues (at least not nearly so much as he or she is obliged to do in American cultural contexts). Not obligated to express themselves without interruption, Asians use silence as a tool in communication. Silence, by most Western conventions, represents discontinuity of communication and creates a feeling of discomfort and anxiety. In the Orient, however, silence is not only comfortably tolerated but is considered a desirable form of expression. Far from being a sign of displeasure or animosity, it serves as an integral part of the communication process, used for reflecting on messages previously exchanged and for carefully crafting thoughts before uttering them.

It is not outlandish at all, then, for Asians to view Americans as unnecessarily talkative and lacking in the ability to listen. For the Asian, it is the American who projects a mask of confidence by being overly expressive both verbally and nonverbally. Since the American style of communication places less emphasis on the act of listening than on speaking, Asians suspect that their American counterparts fail to pick up subtle and astute communicative signs in conversation. To one with a cultural outlook untrained in reading those signs, an inscrutable face represents no more than a menacing or amusing mask.

Source: Dr. Jin Kim, State University of New York–Plattsburgh. Copyright © 2003 by Dr. Jin Kim. Used with permission of Dr. Kim.

The importance of understanding the role of context and nonverbal language to avoid misinterpretation is illustrated in the accompanying feature, *Comparative Management in Focus: Communicating with Arabs*.



COMPARATIVE MANAGEMENT IN FOCUS

Communicating with Arabs

In the Middle East, the meaning of a communication is implicit and interwoven, and consequently much harder for Americans, accustomed to explicit and specific meanings, to understand.

Arabs are warm, emotional, and quick to explode: “sounding off” is regarded as a safety valve. In fact, the Arabic language aptly communicates the Arabic culture, one of emotional extremes. The language contains the means for overexpression, many adjectives, words that allow for exaggeration, and metaphors to emphasize a position. What is said is often not as important as *how* it is said. Eloquence and flowery speech are admired for their own sake, regardless of the content. Loud speech is used for dramatic effect.

At the core of Middle Eastern culture are friendship, honor, religion, and traditional hospitality. Family, friends, and connections are very important on all levels in the Middle East and will take precedence over business transactions. Arabs do business with people, not companies, and they make commitments to people, not contracts. A phone call to the right person can help to get around seemingly insurmountable obstacles. An Arab expects loyalty from friends, and it is understood that giving and receiving favors is an inherent part of the relationship; no one says “no” to a request for a favor. A lack of follow-through is assumed to be beyond the friend’s control.⁵⁷

Because hospitality is a way of life and highly symbolic, a visitor must be careful not to reject it by declining refreshment or rushing into business discussions. Part of that hospitality is the elaborate system of greetings and the long period of getting acquainted, perhaps taking up the entire first meeting. While the handshake may seem limp, the rest of the greeting is not. Kissing on the cheeks is common among men, as is hand-holding between male friends. However, any public display of intimacy between men and women is strictly forbidden by the Arab social code.

Women play little or no role in business or entertainment; the Middle East is a male-dominated society, and it is impolite to inquire about women. Other nonverbal taboos include showing the soles of one’s feet and using the left (unclean) hand to eat or pass something. In discussions, slouching in a seat or leaning against a wall communicates a lack of respect.

The Arab society also values honor. Harris and Moran explain: “Honor, social prestige, and a secure place in society are brought about when conformity is achieved. When one fails to conform, this is considered to be damning and leads to a degree of shame.”⁵⁸ Shame results not just from doing

MAP 4.1 Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula



(Continued)

FIGURE 4-6 Westerner Meeting with Arab Businessman

Source: Hi Brow Arabia/Alamy

something wrong but from having others find out about that wrongdoing. Establishing a climate of honesty and trust is part of the sense of honor. Therefore, considerable tact is needed to avoid conveying any concern or doubt. Arabs tend to be quite introverted until a mutual trust is built, which takes a long time.⁵⁹

In their nonverbal communication, most Arab countries are high-contact cultures. Arabs stand and sit closer and touch people of the same sex more than Westerners. They do not have the same concept of “public” and “private” space, or as Hall puts it, “Not only is the sheer noise level much higher, but the piercing look of the eyes, the touch of the hands, and the mutual bathing in the warm moist breath during conversation represent stepped-up sensory inputs to a level which many Europeans find unbearably intense. On the other hand, the distance preferred by North Americans may leave an Arab suspicious of intentions because of the lack of olfactory contact.”⁶⁰

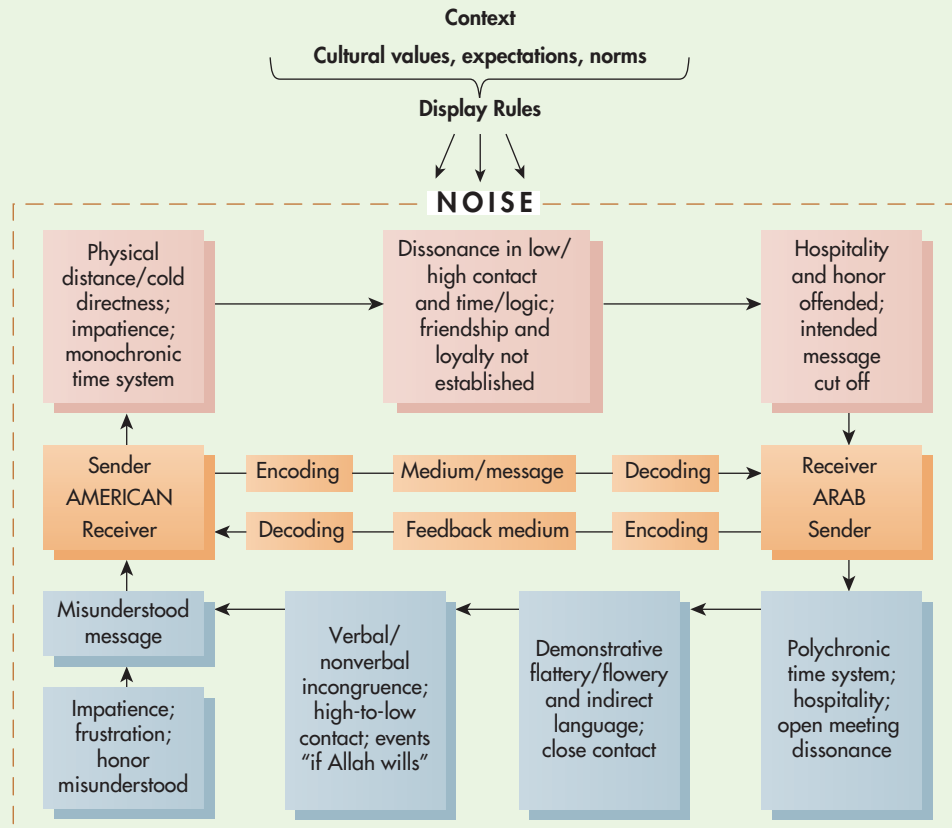
The Muslim expression *Bukra insha Allah*—“Tomorrow if Allah wills”—explains much about the Arab culture and its approach to business transactions. A cultural clash typically occurs when an American tries to give an Arab a deadline. “‘I am going to Damascus tomorrow morning and will have to have my car tonight,’ is a sure way to get the mechanic to stop work,” explains Hall, “because to give another person a deadline in this part of the world is to be rude, pushy, and demanding.”⁶¹ In such instances, the attitude toward time communicates as loudly as words.

In verbal interactions, managers must be aware of different patterns of Arab thought and communication. Compared to the direct, linear fashion of American communication, Arabs tend to meander: They start with social talk, discuss business for a while, loop round to social and general issues, then back to business, and so on.⁶² American impatience and insistence on sticking to the subject will “cut off their loops,” triggering confusion and dysfunction. Instead, Westerners should accept that there will be considerable time spent on “small talk” and socializing, with frequent interruptions, before getting down to business.

Exhibit 4-5 illustrates some of the sources of noise that are likely to interfere in the communication process between Americans and Arabs, thereby causing miscommunications and misunderstandings.

For people doing business in the Middle East, the following are some useful guidelines for effective communication:

- Be patient. Recognize the Arab attitude toward time and hospitality—take time to develop friendship and trust, for these are prerequisites for any social or business transactions.

EXHIBIT 4-5 Miscommunication between Americans and Arabs Caused by Cross-Cultural Noise

- Recognize that people and relationships matter more to Arabs than the job, company, or contract—conduct business personally, not by correspondence or telephone.
- Avoid expressing doubts or criticism when others are present—recognize the importance of honor and dignity to Arabs.
- Adapt to the norms of body language, flowery speech, and circuitous verbal patterns in the Middle East, and don't be impatient to "get to the point."
- Expect many interruptions in meetings, delays in schedules, and changes in plans.⁶³

Communication Channels

In addition to the variables related to the sender and receiver of a message, the variables linked to the channel itself and the context of the message must be taken into consideration. These variables include fast or slow messages and information flows, as well as different types of media.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Communication in organizations varies according to where and how it originates, the channels, and the speed at which it flows, whether it is formal or informal, and so forth. The type of organizational structure, the staffing policies, and the leadership style will affect the nature of an organization's information system.

As an international manager, it is useful to know where and how information originates and the speed at which it flows, both internally and externally. In centralized organizational structures, as in South America, most information originates from top managers. Workers take less responsibility for keeping managers informed in a South American company than in a typical

company in the United States, where delegation results in information flowing from the staff to the managers. In a decision-making system in which many people are involved, such as the **ringi system** of consensus decision making in Japan, the expatriate needs to understand that there is a systematic pattern for information flow.

Context also affects information flow. In high-context cultures (such as in the Middle East), information spreads rapidly and freely because of the constant close contact and the implicit ties among people and organizations. Information flow is often informal. In low-context cultures (such as Germany or the United States), information is controlled and focused, and thus it does not flow so freely.⁶⁴ Compartmentalized roles and office layouts stifle information channels; information sources tend to be more formal.

It is crucial for an expatriate manager to find out how to tap into a firm's informal sources of information. In Japan, employees usually have a drink together on the way home from work, and this becomes an essential source of information. However, such communication networks are based on long-term relationships in Japan (and in other high-context cultures). The same information may not be readily available to "outsiders." A considerable barrier in Japan separates strangers from familiar friends, a situation that discourages communication.

Americans are more open and talk freely about almost anything, whereas Japanese will disclose little about their inner thoughts or private issues. Americans are willing to have a wide "public self," disclosing their inner reactions verbally and physically. In contrast, the Japanese prefer to keep their responses largely to their "private self." The Japanese expose only a small portion of their thoughts; they reduce, according to Barnlund, "the unpredictability and emotional intensity of personal encounters."⁶⁵ In intercultural communication between Americans and Japanese, cultural clashes between the public and private selves result when each party forces its cultural norms of communication on the other. In the American style, the American's cultural norms of explicit communication impose on the Japanese by invading the person's private self. The Japanese style of implicit communication causes a negative reaction from the American because of what is perceived as too much formality and ambiguity, which wastes time.⁶⁶

Cultural variables in information systems and context underlie the many differences in communication style between Japanese and Americans. Exhibit 4-6 shows some specific differences. The Japanese *ningensei* ("human beingness") style of communication refers to the preference for humanity, reciprocity, a receiver orientation, and an underlying distrust of words and analytic logic.⁶⁷ The Japanese believe that true intentions are not readily revealed in words or contracts but are, in fact, masked by them. In contrast to the typical American's verbal agility and explicitness, Japanese behaviors and communications are directed to defend and give face for everyone concerned; to do so, they avoid public disagreements at all costs. In cross-cultural negotiations, this last point is essential.

The speed with which we try to use information systems is another key variable that needs attention to avoid misinterpretation and conflict. Americans expect to give and receive information very quickly and clearly, moving through details and stages in a linear fashion to the conclusion. They usually use various media for fast messages—IMs, emails, Skype, faxes, social media, and familiar relationships—to give all the facts up front. In contrast, the French use the slower message channels of deep relationships, culture, and sometimes mediators to exchange information. A French written communication will be tentative, with subsequent letters slowly building up to a new proposal. The French preference for written communication, even for informal interactions, echoes the formality of their relationships—and results in a slowing down of message transmission that often seems unnecessary to Americans.⁶⁸

In short, it behooves Americans to realize that, because much of the world exchanges business information through slower message media, it is wise to schedule more time for transactions, develop patience, and learn to get at needed information in more subtle ways—after building rapport and taking time to observe the local system for exchanging information.

We have seen that cross-cultural misinterpretation can result from noise in the actual transmission of the message—the choice or speed of media. Interpreting the meaning of a message can thus be as much a function of examining the transmission channel (or medium) as it is of examining the message itself.

EXHIBIT 4-6 Differences between Japanese and American Communication Styles

Japanese Ningensei Style of Communication	U.S. Adversarial Style of Communication
1. Indirect verbal and nonverbal communication	1. More direct verbal and nonverbal communication
2. Relationship communication	2. More task communication
3. Discourages confrontational strategies	3. Confrontational strategies more acceptable
4. Strategically ambiguous communication	4. Prefers more to-the-point communication
5. Delayed feedback	5. More immediate feedback
6. Patient, longer-term negotiators	6. Shorter-term negotiators
7. Uses fewer words	7. Favors verbosity
8. Distrustful of skillful verbal communicators	8. Exalts verbal eloquence
9. Group orientation	9. More individualistic orientation
10. Cautious, tentative	10. More assertive, self-assured
11. Complementary communicators	11. More publicly critical communication
12. Softer, heart-like logic	12. Harder, analytic logic preferred
13. Sympathetic, empathetic, complex use of pathos	13. Favors logos, reason
14. Expresses and decodes complex relational strategies and nuances	14. Expresses and decodes complex logos, cognitive nuances
15. Avoids decision making in public	15. Frequent decision making in public
16. Makes decisions in private venues, away from public eye	16. Frequent decision in public at negotiating tables
17. Decisions via <i>ringi</i> and <i>nemawashi</i> (complete consensus process)	17. Decisions by majority rule and public compromise is more commonplace
18. Uses go-betweens for decision making	18. More extensive use of direct person-to-person, player-to-player interaction for decisions
19. Understatement and hesitation in verbal and nonverbal communication	19. May publicly speak in superlatives, exaggerations, nonverbal projection
20. Uses qualifiers, tentativeness, humility as communicator	20. Favors fewer qualifiers, more ego-centered
21. Receiver/listening-centered	21. More speaker- and message-centered
22. Inferred meanings, looks beyond words to nuances, nonverbal communication	22. More face-value meaning, more denotative
23. Shy, reserved communicators	23. More publicly self-assertive
24. Distaste for purely business transactions	24. Prefers to “get down to business” or “nitty gritty”
25. Mixes business and social communication	25. Tends to keep business negotiating more separated from social communication
26. Utilizes <i>matomari</i> or “hints” for achieving group adjustment and saving face in negotiating	26. More directly verbalizes management’s preference at negotiating tables
27. Practices <i>haragei</i> or “belly logic” and communication	27. Practices more linear, discursive, analytical logic; greater reverence for cognitive than for affective

Source: A. Goldman, “The Centrality of ‘Ningensei’ to Japanese Negotiating and Interpersonal Relationships: Implications for U.S.-Japanese Communication,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 18, no. 1 (1994), with permission from the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2011.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: GOING GLOBAL AND ACTING LOCAL

Microsoft has struck a deal with the biggest Chinese search engine, Baidu.com, to offer Web search services in English.

WWW.NYTIMES.COM,
JULY 4, 2011.⁶⁹

All information is local; IT systems can connect every corner of the globe, but IT managers are learning they have to pay attention to regional differences.

COMPUTERWORLD.⁷⁰

Using the Internet as a global medium for communication has enabled companies of all sizes to quickly develop a presence in many markets around the world—and, in fact, has enabled them to “go global.” However, their global reach cannot alone translate into global business. Those companies are learning that they have to adapt their e-commerce and their enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications to regional idiosyncrasies beyond translation or content management issues; for example, even asking for a name or an email address can incur resistance in many countries where people do not like to give out personal information.⁷¹ (These issues are further discussed in the accompanying Under the Lens feature about Google.) While communication over the Internet is clearly not as personal as face-to-face, cross-cultural communication, those transactions must still be regionalized and personalized to adjust to differences in language, culture, local laws, and business models, as well as differences in the level of development in the local telecommunications infrastructure. Yet, if the Internet is a global medium for communication, why do so many U.S. companies treat the Web as a U.S.-centric phenomenon? Giving preference to some geographic regions, languages, and cultures is “a short-sighted business decision that will result in diminished brand equity, market share, profits and global leadership.”⁷²

When Baidu.com—China’s leading search engine—made a business decision in July 2011 to partner with Microsoft to offer web search services in English, it had clearly realized that it needed to go beyond Chinese because of the 10 million per day searches for English terms on its site.

“More and more people here are searching for English terms,” Kaiser Kuo, the company’s spokesman, said Monday. “But Baidu hasn’t done a good job. So here’s a way for us to do it.”⁷³

For its part, Microsoft’s expansion of “Bing” in China gave it access to the world’s largest Internet population of over 470 million users. Both companies realized that the English-language search results would be censored (as happened to Google, which pulled out of the mainland and went to Hong Kong). Reports in 2012 say that Microsoft is cooperating with China’s government on censorship rules regarding the content that can be accessed.⁷⁴ Beijing requires those Internet companies operating on the mainland to censor results the government considers threatening, including references to human rights issues and dissidents.⁷⁵ Clearly, both going global and acting local can be fraught with difficulties.

It seems essential, then, that a global online strategy must also be multilocal. The impersonal nature of the Web must somehow be adapted to local cultures to establish relationships and create customer loyalty. Effective technological communication requires even more cultural sensitivity than face-to-face communication because of the inability to assess reactions and get feedback or, in many cases, to even retain contact. It is still people, after all, who respond to and interact with other people through the medium of the Internet, and those people interpret and respond according to their own languages and cultures, as well as their local business practices and expectations. In Europe, for example, significant differences in business cultures and e-business technology have slowed e-business progress there. However, some companies are making progress in pan-European integration services, such as *leEurope*, which aims to cross language, currency, and cultural barriers. Specifically, *leEurope* is building a set of services “to help companies tie their back-end e-business systems together across European boundaries through a series of mergers involving regional e-business integrators in more than a dozen countries.”⁷⁶



UNDER THE LENS

Google's "Street View" Makes Friends in Japan but Clashes with European Culture⁷⁷

After the 9.0 earthquake in Japan in March 2011, which was followed by a devastating tsunami, Google used its assembly of nine cameras creating 360-degree panoramic digital images of the disaster zone to archive damage. Its Street View mapping service was welcomed after the disaster, as observed by the mayor of Kesunnuma:

"I'd like them to record Kesunnuma's streets now," Mr. Sugawara said. "Then I'd like them to come back, when the city is like new again, and show the world the new Kesunnuma."⁷⁸

In addition, Google went live with its online "Person Finder" service less than two hours after the quake. The site helped people find out about the status of family and friends in the aftermath of the disaster. While many did not have Internet access after the disaster and simply posted signs about missing people, others took photos of the signs and uploaded them to Google for use in the Person Finder service. Even the National Police posted information, and soon Person Finder had collected 616,300 records, Japan's largest database of missing people from the disaster. After Google's many blunders in Japan, and privacy concerns about the company's services, it now seems that its technology was able to help the Japanese people and also resulted in raising its brand and social networking identity there.⁷⁹

However, Google has been less well received in Europe. The company has been expanding into European markets for years and now has a headquarters in Dublin, large offices in Zurich and London, and smaller centers in countries such as Denmark, Russia, and Poland. But the company has been caught in a cultural web of privacy laws that threaten its growth and the positive image it has cultivated.

"The framework in Europe is of privacy as a human-dignity right," said Nicole Wong, a lawyer with the [Google] company. "As enforced in the U.S., it's a consumer-protection right."⁸⁰

Google's plan to introduce "Street View," a mapping service that provides a vivid, 360-degree, ground-level photographic panorama from any address, met with considerable resistance. Data protection officials in Switzerland pressured Google to cancel those plans, since "Street View" would violate strict Swiss privacy laws that prohibit the unauthorized use of personal images or property. In Germany, where Street View is also not available, simply taking photographs for the service violates privacy laws. After pressure from a German data protection official, Google had to show what its Street View cars had been collecting: "Snippets of e-mails, photographs, passwords, chat messages, postings on Web sites and social networks—all sorts of private Internet communications."⁸¹ This was a blatant violation of Europe's data protection laws, and European antitrust regulators gave the company an ultimatum to change its search business or face legal consequences. This conflict was continuing to play out in the summer of 2012, and had spread to the United States and other countries, seemingly all having difficulty in holding Google accountable. At the same time, the EU's Article 29 Data Protection Working Group, which is a collaboration among all the information and data protection watchdogs within the European Union, is also contesting Google's practices. The EU Justice Commissioner, Franco Frattini, was backing the investigation. Google, the world's largest search engine, also provoked a debate about Internet privacy in May 2008, when it announced it would institute changes to its policies on holding personal information about its customers. The policy change related to Google's server logs (the information a browser sends back to Google when somebody visits a site). At present, the search engine retains a log of every search indefinitely, including information—such as the unique computer address, browser type, and language—that could be traced back to a particular computer. The policy change was to reduce how long that information was retained to 18–24 months.

Peter Schaar, chair of Article 29 and also Germany's federal commissioner for freedom of information, developed a report on the relationship between search-engine business models and European privacy laws. The draft report concluded that IP addresses are personal information because they can help identify a person. Europeans fiercely protect their privacy and trust that the government enforces it in law. Mr. Schaar has challenged Peter Fleischer of Google's global privacy law team to explain why such a long storage period was chosen and to give a legal justification for the storage of server logs in general. Google's response so far, from founders Sergei Brin and Larry Page, was to identify others as the greater threat to Internet users' privacy. They stated that information posted on social networking sites, such as photographs of young people at drunken parties, are a greater privacy concern. They defended the value of users' information for refining search results, and blamed the way some companies have used that information for privacy problems in the industry. The outcome of this cross-cultural Internet communication clash remains to be seen. One thing that is clear is that the European Union (EU) has fired a warning shot across the bows of the search-engine companies.

MANAGING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Steps toward effective intercultural communication include the development of cultural sensitivity, careful encoding, selective transmission, careful decoding, and appropriate follow-up actions.

Developing Cultural Sensitivity

When acting as a sender, a manager must make it a point to know the receiver and to encode the message in a form that will most likely be understood as intended. On the manager's part, this requires an awareness of his or her own cultural baggage and how it affects the communication process. In other words, what kinds of behaviors does the message imply, and how will they be perceived by the receiver? The way to anticipate the most likely meaning that the receiver will attach to the message is to internalize honest cultural empathy with that person. What is the cultural background—the societal, economic, and organizational context—in which this communication is taking place? What are this person's expectations regarding the situation, what are the two parties' relative positions, and what might develop from this communication? What kinds of transactions and behaviors is this person used to? Cultural sensitivity (discussed in Chapter 3) is really just a matter of understanding the other person, the context, and how the person will respond to the context. Americans, unfortunately, have a rather negative reputation overseas of not being culturally sensitive. One not-for-profit group, called Business for Diplomatic Action, has the following advice for Americans when doing business abroad, in its attempts to counteract the stereotypical American traits such as boastfulness, loudness, and speed:

- **Read a map:** Familiarize yourself with the local geography to avoid making insulting mistakes.
- **Dress up:** In some countries, casual dress is a sign of disrespect.
- **Talk small:** Talking about wealth, power, or status—corporate or personal—can create resentment.
- **No slang:** Even casual profanity is unacceptable.
- **Slow down:** Americans talk fast, eat fast, move fast, live fast. Many cultures do not.
- **Listen as much as you talk:** Ask people you're visiting about themselves and their way of life.
- **Speak lower and slower:** A loud voice is often perceived as bragging.
- **Religious restraint:** In many countries, religion is not a subject for public discussion.
- **Political restraint:** Steer clear of this subject. If someone is attacking U.S. politicians or policies, agree to disagree.⁸²

Careful Encoding

In translating his or her intended meaning into symbols for cross-cultural communication, the sender must use words, pictures, or gestures that are appropriate to the receiver's frame of reference. Of course, language training is invaluable, but senders should also avoid idioms and regional sayings (such as "Go fly a kite" or "Foot the bill") in a translation, or even in English when speaking to a non-American who knows little English.

Literal translation, then, is a limited answer to language differences. Even for people in English-speaking countries, words may have different meanings. Ways to avoid problems are to speak slowly and clearly, avoid long sentences and colloquial expressions, and explain things in several different ways and through several media, if possible. However, even though English is in common use around the world for business transactions, the manager's efforts to speak the local language will greatly improve the climate. Sometimes people from other cultures resent the assumption by English-speaking executives that everyone else will speak English.

Language translation is only part of the encoding process; the message also is expressed in nonverbal language. In the encoding process, the sender must ensure congruence between the nonverbal and the verbal message. In encoding a message, therefore, it is useful to be as objective as possible and not to rely on personal interpretations. To further clarify their messages, managers can hand out written summaries of verbal presentations and use visual aids, such as graphs or pictures. A good general guide is to move slowly, wait, and take cues from the receivers.

Selective Transmission

The type of medium chosen for the message depends on the nature of the message, its level of importance, the context and expectations of the receiver, the timing involved, and the need for personal interaction, among other factors. Typical media include instant messaging (IM), email, letters or memos, reports, meetings, telephone calls, teleconferences, videoconferences, or face-to-face conversations. The secret is to find out how communication is transmitted in the local organization—how much is downward versus upward or vertical versus horizontal, how the grapevine works, and so on. In addition, the cultural variables discussed earlier need to be considered: whether the receiver is from a high- or low-context culture, whether he or she is used to explicit or implicit communication, and what speed and routing of messages will be most effective.

For the most part, it is best to use face-to-face interaction for relationship building or for other important transactions, particularly in intercultural communications, because of the lack of familiarity between parties. Personal interactions give the manager the opportunity to get immediate verbal and visual feedback and to make rapid adjustments in the communication process.

International dealings are often long-distance, of course, limiting the opportunity for face-to-face communication. However, personal rapport can be established or enhanced through telephone calls or videoconferencing and through trusted contacts. Modern electronic media and social networks can be used to break down communication barriers by reducing waiting periods for information, clarifying issues, and allowing instant consultation, such as via Skype, for one-on-one or group video-chat. Ford Europe uses videoconferencing for engineers in Britain and Germany to consult about quality problems. Through the video monitors, they examine one another's engineering diagrams and usually find a solution that gets the factory moving again in a short time.

Careful Decoding of Feedback

Timely and effective feedback channels can also be set up to assess a firm's general communication about the progression of its business and its general management principles. The best means for getting accurate feedback is through face-to-face interaction, because this allows the manager to hear, see, and immediately sense how a message is being interpreted. When visual feedback on important issues is not possible or appropriate, it is a good idea to use several means of attaining feedback, in particular by employing third parties.

Decoding is the process of translating the received symbols into the interpreted message. The main causes of incongruence are (1) the receiver misinterprets the message, (2) the receiver encodes his or her return message incorrectly, or (3) the sender misinterprets the feedback. Two-way communication is thus essential for important issues so that successive efforts can be made until an understanding has been achieved. Asking other colleagues to help interpret what is going on is often a good way to break a cycle of miscommunication.

Perhaps the most important means for avoiding miscommunication is to practice careful decoding by improving one's listening and observation skills. A good listener practices projective listening, or empathetic listening—listening, without interruption or evaluation, to the full message of the speaker; attempting to recognize the feelings behind the words and nonverbal cues; and understanding the speaker's perspective.

At the multinational corporation (MNC) level, avenues of communication and feedback among parent companies and subsidiaries can be kept open through telephone calls, regular meetings and visits, reports, and plans, all of which facilitate cooperation, performance control, and the smooth running of the company. Communication among far-flung operations can be best managed by setting up feedback systems and liaison people. The headquarters people should maintain considerable flexibility in cooperating with local managers and allowing them to deal with the local context as they see fit.

Follow-up Actions

Managers communicate through both action and inaction. Therefore, to keep open the lines of communication, feedback, and trust, managers must follow through with action on what has been discussed and then agreed upon—typically a contract, which is probably the most important formal business communication. Unfortunately, the issue of contract follow-through is a particularly sensitive one across cultures because of the different interpretations regarding what constitutes a contract (perhaps a handshake, perhaps a full legal document) and what actions should result. Trust, future communications, and future business are based on such interpretations, and it is up to managers to understand them and to follow through on them.

The management of cross-cultural communication depends largely on a manager's personal abilities and behavior. Those behaviors that researchers indicate to be most important to intercultural communication effectiveness (ICE) are listed here, as reviewed by Ruben:

1. Respect (conveyed through eye contact, body posture, voice tone, and pitch)
2. Interaction posture (the ability to respond to others in a descriptive, nonevaluative, and nonjudgmental way)
3. Orientation to knowledge (recognizing that one's knowledge, perception, and beliefs are valid only for oneself and not for everyone else)
4. Empathy
5. Interaction management
6. Tolerance for ambiguity
7. Other-oriented role behavior (one's capacity to be flexible and to adopt different roles for the sake of greater group cohesion and group communication)⁸³

Researchers have established a relationship between personality traits and behaviors and the ability to adapt to the host-country's cultural environment.⁸⁴ What is seldom pointed out, however, is that communication is the mediating factor between those behaviors and the relative level of adaptation the expatriate achieves. The communication process facilitates cross-cultural adaptation, and, through this process, expatriates learn the dominant communication patterns of the host society. Therefore, we can link those personality factors shown by research to ease adaptation with those necessary for effective intercultural communication.

Kim has consolidated the research findings of these characteristics into two categories: (1) **openness**—traits such as open-mindedness, tolerance for ambiguity, and extrovertedness; and (2) **resilience**—traits such as having an internal locus of control, persistence, a tolerance of ambiguity, and resourcefulness.⁸⁵ These personality factors, along with the expatriate's cultural and racial identity and the level of preparedness for change, comprise that person's potential for adaptation. The level of preparedness can be improved by the manager before his or her assignment by gathering information about the host country's verbal and nonverbal communication patterns and norms of behavior. However, we must remember the practicalities of situational factors that can affect the communication process—variables such as the physical environment, time constraints, the degree of structure, and feelings of irritability or overwork, among others.

CONCLUSION

Effective intercultural communication is a vital skill for international managers and domestic managers of multicultural workforces. Because miscommunication is much more likely to occur among people from different countries or racial backgrounds than among those from similar backgrounds, it is important to be alert to how culture is reflected in communication—in particular through the development of cultural sensitivity and an awareness of potential sources of cultural noise in the communication process. A successful international manager is thus attuned to these variables and is flexible enough to adjust his or her communication style to best address the intended receivers—that is, to do it “their way.”

Cultural variables and the manner in which culture is communicated underlie the processes of negotiation and decision making. How do people around the world negotiate? What are their expectations and their approach to negotiations? What is the importance of understanding negotiation and decision-making processes in other countries? Chapter 5 addresses these questions and makes suggestions for the international manager to handle these important tasks.

Summary of Key Points

1. Communication is an inherent part of a manager's role, taking up the majority of the manager's time on the job. Effective intercultural communication largely determines the success of international transactions or the output of a culturally diverse workforce.
2. Culture is the foundation of communication, and communication transmits culture. Cultural variables that can affect the communication process by influencing a person's perceptions include attitudes, social organizations, thought patterns, roles, language, nonverbal language, and time.

3. Language conveys cultural understandings and social norms from one generation to the next. Body language, or nonverbal communication, is behavior that communicates without words. It accounts for 65 to 93 percent of interpreted communication.
4. Types of nonverbal communication around the world are kinesic behavior, proxemics, paralanguage, and object language.
5. Effective cross-cultural communication must take into account whether the receiver is from a country with a monochronic or a polychronic time system.
6. Variables related to channels of communication include high- and low-context cultures, fast or slow messages and information flows, and various types of media.
7. In high-context cultures, feelings and messages are implicit and must be accessed through an understanding of the person and the system. In low-context cultures, feelings and thoughts are expressed, and information is more readily available.
8. The effective management of intercultural communication necessitates the development of cultural sensitivity, careful encoding, selective transmission, careful decoding, and follow-up actions.
9. Certain personal abilities and behaviors facilitate adaptation to the host country through skilled intercultural communication.
10. Communication via the Internet must still be localized to adjust to differences in language, culture, local laws, and business models.

Discussion Questions

1. How does culture affect the process of attribution in communication? Can you relate this to some experiences you have had with your classmates?
2. What is stereotyping? Give some examples. How might people stereotype you?
3. What is the relationship between language and culture? How is it that people from different countries who speak the same language may still miscommunicate?
4. Give some examples of cultural differences in the interpretation of body language. What is the role of such nonverbal communication in business relationships?
5. Explain the differences between monochronic and polychronic time systems. Use some examples to illustrate their differences and the role of time in intercultural communication.
6. Explain the differences between high- and low-context cultures, giving some examples. What are the differential effects on the communication process?
7. Discuss the role of information systems in a company, how and why they vary from country to country, and the effects of these variations.
8. Discuss the role of social media in global business communication.

Application Exercises

1. Form groups in your class—multicultural groups, if possible. Have each person make notes about his or her perceptions of (1) Mexican-Americans, (2) Native Americans, (3) African Americans, and (4) Americans of European descent. Discuss your notes and draw conclusions about common stereotypes. Discuss any differences and why stereotyping occurs.
2. Invite some students who are from other countries to your class. Ask them to bring photographs, slides, and so forth of people and events in their native countries. Have them explain the meanings of various nonverbal cues, such as gestures, dress, voice inflections, architecture, and events. Discuss with them any differences between their explanations and the attributions you assigned to those cues.
3. Interview a faculty member or a businessperson who has worked abroad. Ask him or her to identify factors that facilitated or inhibited adaptation to the host environment. Ask whether more preparation could have eased the transition and what, if anything, that person would do differently before another trip.

Experiential Exercise

Form two or three pairs to enact skits—separately—in front of the class and then ask your class for feedback and to guess where you are from.

Each person in each pair decides on a different cultural profile to enact—for example, act as if one of you is, say, Japanese or Arab, and the other is, say, German or Mexican. Set up a five-to-ten minute “skit,” presumably for an intended business

transaction. Research and practice with your partner the typical communication style, both verbal and nonverbal (use English for everyone).

Both you and your class will see how difficult it is to put yourself in the persona of someone from a different cultural background.

Internet Resources

Visit the Deresky Companion Website at www.pearsonhighered.com/deresky for this chapter's Internet resources.

CASE STUDY

Miscommunications with a Brazilian Auto Parts Manufacturer

The Brazilian sun beat down steadily on the tarmac outside as Alessandro Silva and Agosto Ventura stood inside the São Paulo-Guarulhos International Airport. They were awaiting the arrival of two representatives from Lucky Auto Parts Company, a regional wholesaler and retailer based in Ames, Iowa.

Mr. Silva, the president of a mid-sized auto parts manufacturer in São Paulo, and Mr. Ventura, the company's sales manager, were looking forward to a new business relationship with Henry Williams, President of Lucky Auto Parts Company. A few weeks previously, in an initial phone call, President Silva invited President Williams to visit the Brazilian manufacturing facility, a potential source of after-market auto parts for Lucky. This would be the American company's first venture into buying parts directly from a foreign manufacturer. Williams planned to take his new Vice-President of Purchasing, Wally Astor, who also happened to be his son-in-law, on this first trip. Mr. Williams thought this exploratory buying trip would be a good introduction to the auto parts business for Wally; although Wally had experience as a new car salesman, he had no experience in the auto parts field.

Unfortunately, a few days before the trip, Williams had to cancel his trip in order to be available for a deposition on a court case pending against his company. It had taken a long time to get the appointment with Mr. Silva, and Williams did not think it wise to cancel the trip. Since Wally was eager to prove himself in his new role, Williams decided to let him handle this mission without the "old man" looking over his shoulder. In the rush to review the legal documents for the deposition, Williams forgot to notify his Brazilian counterpart that he would not be coming on this visit.

As he was preparing for the trip, Wally Astor realized that it was summer in Brazil and that it was a long flight to Brazil from Ames via Miami. Based on this, he decided to dress as informally and comfortably as possible.

At the airport, both Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto were dressed as usual when conducting business or in the public eye for social occasions, that is, in suits and ties. As they stood outside the door of the International Arrivals area, Agosto held a neatly printed sign with Wally Astor's name on it. Soon a young man in his late 20's approached them and announced that he was Wally Astor; both Mr. Silva and Mr. Ventura were visibly surprised, especially since the young man was dressed in faded blue jeans, sneakers, and a checked shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

"Hey, thanks for picking me up," Wally said as the three shook hands. "You must be Alexander and Agosto? My father-in-law said you were going to meet us at the airport."

"I am President Alessandro Silva and this is my Marketing Director, Mr. Ventura," Mr. Silva said icily. "We expected to see President Williams. Will he be coming on a later flight?"

"No, he had something important come up, so he sent me to take care of the visit to Brazil," Wally replied. "Oh, here, let me give you my business card so you'll know I really am who I say I am."

President Silva read the card carefully, and turned to Agosto with a frown. The card had the U.S. flag emblazoned on it with an italicized inscription under it: *An American-owned business.*

Agosto turned to Wally and said politely, "I'm certain you are tired from your long journey. Shall we drop you at your hotel and then pick you up for dinner about nine o'clock?"

"Nine o'clock! Isn't that a little late for dinner?" Wally exclaimed. "No, let's just go to your office and get right to it, shall we? I have a contract drawn up by the lawyer-types in my department. I think you'll find it covers all the details and is more than fair."

President Silva spoke up more forcefully than he intended, "Mr. Astor. . ."

"Please call me Wally."

"No, Mr. Astor. I don't know you or your company well enough to call you by your first name and certainly not well enough to look at an important contract with you today. I was impressed with the phone conversation I had with President Williams, but *he* is not here today, so let's drop you at your hotel and begin our discussion over dinner later this evening."

Wally was surprised and uncomfortable to see Mr. Silva standing very close to him, staring intently into his eyes and gesticulating to emphasize his words. Wally took a step back, but Mr. Silva took a step toward him to close the gap between them.

“OK, Mr. Silva. Maybe I sounded like I was trying to rush things a bit. But you see, I booked my flight out for tomorrow evening so I can spend a couple days in Rio to see what that’s about.”

There was an uncomfortable silence during which no one spoke. Finally, Wally said, “I guess I would like to go to my hotel and rest up. Then we can have dinner at 9:00. OK?”

Ventura knew that President Silva was not warming to Wally, so he decided to see if he could get the relationship back on track. Since he and Wally were about the same age and held the same status within their respective organizations, he felt comfortable doing this.

“That sounds very good, Wally,” Ventura said. “We will pick you up at 9:00. And please, call me Agosto.”

Once he was settled in his hotel room, Wally phoned Henry Williams to check in as instructed.

“Yeah, Dad,” Wally said. “I met with them at the airport. They drove me to the hotel and we’re going to dinner tonight to get acquainted. Can you believe they want to eat at 9 pm?”

“That’s good,” Williams replied. “Did you see their facility yet?”

“No. The president, Mr. Silva, is kinda stiff. He said he wants to get to know us better before he talks business. I think he’s doing the Latin American thing about *mañana*. I tried to get the ball rolling this afternoon, but he wouldn’t hear of it.”

“Well, he’s just being cautious, like I am. I like to know a man personally before I enter into a long-term contract with him, too. Wally, this isn’t like selling cars. It’s building relationships that have to work day after day. I’m sorry I threw you into this situation alone.”

“You know,” Wally said, “I think he’s upset that you aren’t here.”

“I hope you conveyed my apology to him,” Williams replied, “and explained that this deposition came up at the last minute.”

“I sure did.”

“OK. Call me tomorrow afternoon to let me know how the dinner conversation went. How long do you think you’ll be out there?”

“Well, I made reservations to leave for Rio tomorrow evening for a couple days,” Wally said.

“Why are you going to Rio? Who is out there?” Williams asked.

“I promised Mindy I’d check out Rio as a possible vacation spot for later this year.”

“Wally, you don’t work for Mindy. You work for me. If Mr. Silva wants to talk with you for the next few days, that’s exactly what you’re going to do. Forget about going to Rio!”

That evening at the restaurant, Mr. Silva insisted that Wally sit across the table from him and Mr. Agosto.

“Mr. Astor, I want to thank you for joining us for a Brazilian business dinner this evening,” said Mr. Silva. “We always start with *cafezinho*, a very strong espresso. We think it helps the conversation to flow.”

For the next hour, Wally found himself talking freely about his wife, their relationship, his in-laws, his childhood and parents, and many other topics that would never find their way into a business discussion in the U.S. To encourage Wally, Mr. Silva and Agosto shared humorous stories about themselves, and shared their favorite sports, movies, pastimes, wines, and vacation areas.

Their free exchange about themselves continued throughout the dinner, and as the three men were served *cafezinho* after the meal, they began to talk business for the first time that evening. President Silva introduced the topic.

“Wally, I think tomorrow morning you should join us to see the plant. I want you to meet with our Purchasing and Quality Assurance Managers. We pride ourselves on using the best materials and maintaining the strictest tolerance standards. After you are more familiar with how we do things, we will meet again for dinner before your flight to Rio and discuss when Mr. Williams can visit us to resume exploring our potential business partnership.”

“Sir,” Wally began, “I cancelled my trip to Rio so I can learn more about your operation, your products, and where our mutual interests may lie. Perhaps we can have dinner again tomorrow night and decide what our next steps should be for the following few days.”

“I’m very happy to hear you say that. And please, call me Alessandro.”

Case Questions

1. What are three of the cultural “missteps” that Wally Astor and his father-in-law, Henry Williams, made in this scenario? Why do you think this happened?
2. If you were a native of Brazil and advising American business representatives on what to do when talking with Brazilian business partners, what would you tell the Americans about Brazilian culture?
3. Imagine that the situation in this case study was reversed, that is, the Brazilian businessmen were coming to the U.S. to look for a supplier. What would you tell the Brazilians about American business culture to prepare them for success?

Source:

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