

7

Communicating across Cultures

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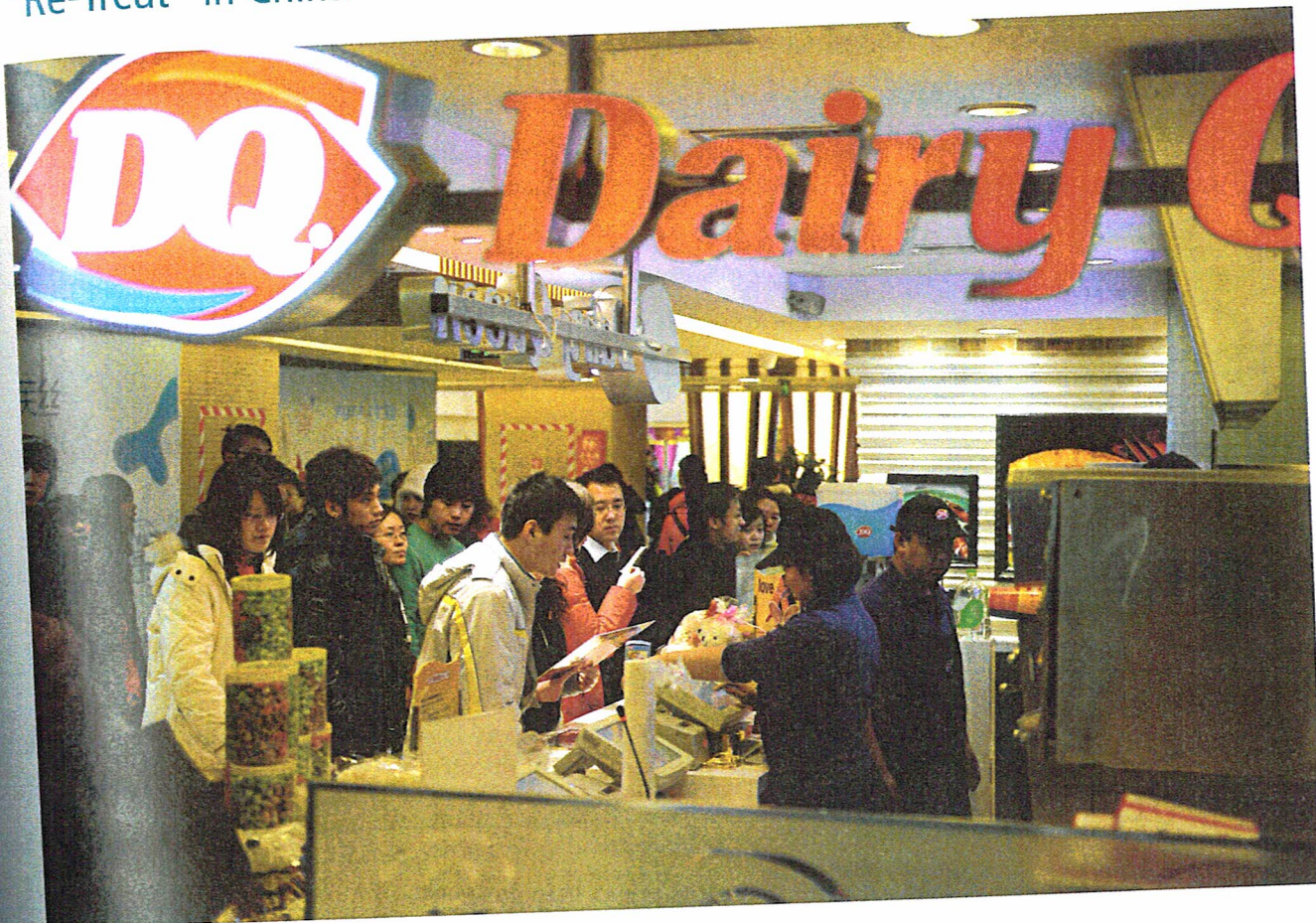
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NEWSWORTHY COMMUNICATION

"Re-Treat" in China



To succeed in international markets, companies often need to adapt to local culture and tastes. American ice cream brands Baskin-Robbins and Dairy Queen have both had a presence in China since the early 1990s, but have had vastly different levels of success.

Dairy Queen, which entered China two years earlier than Baskin-Robbins, has opened more than 500 stores and plans to open another 500 by 2016.

Its success depends on how the company caters to local tastes: strong flavors and fruit-based desserts are popular in northern China, while green-tea-based flavors are favored in southern China. Dairy Queen relies on local owners to help the company balance between specialized local menus and costs of producing those products.

Competitor Baskin-Robbins, on the other hand, had opened only 90 stores in nearly 20 years. Part of the problem was with the branding

and slogans of the company: in China, Baskin-Robbins was known as "31 American Flavors." The company is now reviewing its strategy for China, including clarifying its brand, adapting its menu to local markets, and finding local master franchisees who can guide growth in different regions.

International business success depends on finding ways to appeal to local markets while being sensitive to cultures, values, and beliefs.

Source: Diana Bates, "Baskin-Robbins vs. Dairy Queen: A Delicious Cold War in China," CNNMoney, April 4, 2013, <http://management.fortune.com/2013/04/04/baskin-robbins-dairy-queen-china/>.

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know

- LO 7-1** Why global business is important.
- LO 7-2** Why diversity is becoming more important.
- LO 7-3** How our values and beliefs affect our responses to other people.
- LO 7-4** How nonverbal communication impacts cross-cultural communications.
- LO 7-5** How to adapt oral communication for cross-cultural communications.
- LO 7-6** How to adapt written communications for global audiences.
- LO 7-7** Why it is important to check cultural generalizations.

Marketing to Hispanic Audiences



Procter & Gamble (P&G) is changing marketing strategies to target more Hispanic shoppers. P&G is modifying some products and adding more Hispanic celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and Eva Mendes to promote their products.

Hispanic families are typically younger and larger than the average American family and are a perfect market for items such as diapers and laundry detergents. P&G's researchers found that Hispanic shoppers are often willing to buy the slightly more expensive brands that P&G offers and that they are generally fans of fragrance in products.

Some specific items focused to Hispanic shoppers are Febreze air fresheners such as Brazilian Carnival and Hawaiian Aloha, and Downy fabric softener scented with lavender.

Adapted from Ellen Byron, "Hola: P&G Seeks Latino Shoppers," *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2011, B1.

Our values, priorities, and practices are shaped by the culture in which we grow up. Understanding other cultures is crucial if you want to work in an organization with a diverse group of employees, benefit from a global supply chain, sell your products to other cultures in your country, sell to other countries, manage an international plant or office, or work in this country for a multinational company headquartered in another country. The successful intercultural communicator is

- Aware of the values, beliefs, and practices in other cultures.
- Sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture.
- Aware that his or her preferred values and behaviors are influenced by culture and are not necessarily "right."
- Sensitive to verbal and nonverbal behavior.
- Willing to ask questions about preferences and behaviors.
- Flexible and open to change.

The first step in understanding another culture is to realize that it may do things very differently, and that the difference is not bad or inferior. The second step is understanding that people within a single culture differ.



WARNING: When pushed too far, the kinds of differences summarized in this chapter can turn into stereotypes, which can be just as damaging as ignorance.

Psychologists have shown that stereotypes have serious consequences and that they come into play even when we don't want them to. Asking African American students to identify their race before answering questions taken from the Graduate Record Examination, the standardized test used for admission to graduate schools, cut in half the number of items they got right.

Similarly, asking students to identify their sex at the beginning of Advanced Placement (AP) calculus tests, used to give high school students college credits, lowered the scores of women. If the sex question were moved to the end of the test, about 5% more women would receive AP credit.¹

Don't try to memorize the material in this chapter as a rigid set of rules. Instead, use the examples to get a sense for the kinds of things that differ from one culture to another. Test these generalizations against your experience. When in doubt, ask.

Global Business **LO 7-1**

As we saw in Chapter 4, exports and imports are essential both to the success of individual businesses and to a country's economy as a whole. Even many small businesses have global supply chains. Most major businesses operate globally, and an increasing share of profits comes from outside the headquarters country:

- McDonald's earns 43% of its operating income internationally.
- 3M operates in more than 70 countries and has 65% of its sales internationally.
- Unilever sells products in over 190 countries; more than 55 % of its business is in emerging markets.
- Walmart's international sales earn "only" 28% of the company's sales, but that percentage is a huge \$125 billion.²

Other businesses are following suit. Movie studios, for instance, are turning down scripts that would play well in the United States because they would not play well abroad. Such decisions are seen as sound, since foreign ticket sales are now two-thirds of the global film market. Studios are hiring more foreign actors for blockbusters, rewriting scripts for international audiences, and cutting back on comedies (American humor is frequently not funny abroad).³ Other companies depend on international vendors or operations for services such as call centers, data centers, and accounting centers.

Local Culture Adaptations

As they expand globally, U.S. retailers are catering to local tastes and customs. When expanding to China, Walmart enraged consumers when its stores sold dead fish, and packaged meat, which shoppers saw as old merchandise. Walmart quickly learned to compensate by leaving meat uncovered and installing fish tanks to sell live fish. Walmart also sells live tortoises and snakes; Johnson's Baby Oil is stocked next to moisturizers containing sheep placenta, a native wrinkle "cure." Stores lure customers on foot or bikes with free shuttle buses and home deliveries for large items. Perhaps the biggest change is Walmart's acceptance of organized labor in China; in July 2006 it accepted its first union ever into its stores.

Other companies are also adapting their products to local preferences. Yum Brands, one of the most successful companies operating in China, serves fried shrimp and egg tarts along with Kentucky fried chicken, and Thai fried rice and seafood pizza at Pizza Huts. In the same market, Kraft Foods is offering green tea, mango, and mandarin orange cookies; beef stew; spicy chicken Ritz crackers; lobster cheese; and lemon-tea potato chips. In India, Dunkin' Donuts is offering mango doughnuts and smoothies.⁴ Burger King sells a burger with

Marketing Disney to China



Six months after Hong Kong Disneyland opened, Disney officials were scrambling to understand why attendance was so low at the new park. They turned for answers to Chinese travel agents who book tours. Some of these agents believed Disney officials had not tried to understand the local market and Chinese culture.

After the disappointing start, Disney officials were eager to learn and ready to make changes. Using the travel industry feedback and other market research, Disney developed a new advertising campaign. Original ads had featured an aerial view of the park; new TV spots focused on people and showed guests riding attractions. A new print ad featuring a grandmother, mother, and daughter showed Disneyland as a place where families could have fun together.

Disney also worked to make visitors more comfortable inside the park. At an attraction offered in three different languages, guests gravitated toward the shortest line—usually the line for English-speaking guests. Now, three separate signs clearly mark which language will be used to communicate with guests in that line. Greater use of Mandarin-speaking guides and materials helped guests better enjoy shows and attractions. Also, additional seating was added in dining areas because Chinese diners linger longer than do Americans.

After incorporating these changes as well as others, Hong Kong Disneyland announced its first year in the black in February 2013.

Source: Merissa Marr and Geoffrey A. Fowler, "Chinese Lessons for Disney," *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2006, B1, B5; and Bruce Einhorn, "Disney's Hong Kong Theme Park Finally Turns a Profit," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-02-19/disneys-hong-kong-theme-park-finally-turns-a-profit>.

squid-ink-flavored catsup in Japan, where McDonald's sells a pie filled with mashed potatoes and bacon.⁵

KFC (formerly Kentucky Fried Chicken) achieved a marketing coup in Japan by suggesting that traditional American Christmas dinners centered on fried chicken. The campaign was so successful that Christmas takeout meals from KFC now must be reserved well in

advance of the holiday. Signs in storefronts tell customers how many reservations are still available. Statues of Colonel Sanders are often dressed in kimonos or costumes for photo opportunities outside KFC stores.⁶

The costs for failing to adapt to local cultures can be high. AlertDriving, a Toronto company that provides training for companies' drivers, opened its services in more than 20 countries before it became aware of problems. The driving lessons had been poorly translated, and the instructions did not fit with local laws and customs. To make matters worse, the company did not learn about some of the problems for years because some clients considered criticism disrespectful. Eventually AlertDriving had to spend a million dollars to retranslate and rework all of its materials for local cultures, a costly lesson in cultural awareness.⁷

Outsourcing

Another major aspect of global business is **outsourcing**, sending corporate work to other companies. In the past this work was lower level: garment factories might be in Bangladesh; call or help centers might be in India. Now more companies are also outsourcing higher-level work such as research and accounting. And even outsourcing leaders, such as Tata Consultancy Services of India, are outsourcing; that company now has 8,500 employees in South America.⁸

Outsourcing has also moved from Near East countries to Eastern Europe and South America. IBM, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Ernst & Young have all opened offices in Poland, where they appreciate the highly educated and multilingual young workforce.⁹

International Career Experience

When plants, stores, and offices move overseas, people follow—from top executives to migrant workers. In fact, managers often find they need international experience if they want top-level jobs. Expatriate experience has also been shown to make them more creative and better problem solvers.¹⁰ This effect, combined with booming overseas growth, means that executive headhunters are looking for people with deep bicultural fluency or experience in several countries, with China, India, and Brazil at the top of the list.¹¹ Responding to the need for global experience, business schools



What cultural barriers did Disney need to overcome to help Hong Kong Disneyland succeed? See "Marketing Disney to China" sidebar.

are stepping up their international offerings with classes, international case studies, overseas campuses, and student/faculty exchanges. For both young and experienced hires, second-language proficiency and multicultural awareness are sought.¹²

U.S. workers join a host of migrant workers already abroad. Nepalis work in Korean factories; Mongolians perform menial labor in Prague. Close to half of all migrants are women, many of whom leave children behind. They stay in touch through cell phones and the Internet.¹³

Migrant workers benefit the economies of both host and home countries. The money sent home by migrants, over \$317 billion a year, is three times the world's total foreign aid. For seven countries, that income is over a quarter of their gross domestic product.¹⁴ Thus, the money sent home is one of the major drivers of international development.

Thomas Friedman, Pulitzer Prize author and *New York Times* columnist, uses the metaphor of a flat world to describe the increasing globalization. In *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, he says,

What the flattening of the world means is that we are now connecting all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network, which—if politics and terrorism do not get in the way—could usher in an amazing era of prosperity, innovation, and collaboration, by companies, communities, and individuals.¹⁵

Diversity in North America LO 7-2

Even if you stay in the United States and Canada, you'll work with people whose backgrounds differ from yours. Residents of small towns and rural areas may have different notions of friendliness than do people from big cities. Californians may talk and dress differently than people in the Midwest. The cultural icons that resonate for baby boomers may mean little to millennials. For many workers, local diversity has become as important as international diversity.

The past two decades have seen a growing emphasis on diversity. This diversity comes from many sources:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| ■ Gender | ■ Religion |
| ■ Race and ethnicity | ■ Age |
| ■ Regional and national origin | ■ Sexual orientation |
| ■ Social class | ■ Physical ability |

Many young Americans are already multicultural. According to 2010 U.S. census figures, only 59% of Americans aged 18 to 24 are non-Hispanic whites.¹⁶ Some of them are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. In 2010, the largest numbers of immigrants to the United States have come from Mexico, China, India, the Philippines, Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Vietnam.¹⁷ In 2002 Latinos became the largest minority group in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2042, the non-Hispanic white population will be less than 50% of the country's total population.¹⁸ A comparable estimate from the Pew Research Center predicts the change will occur by 2050.¹⁹ Already California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas have a population that is more than 50% minorities; the Census Bureau labels these states as having a "majority-minority" population.²⁰

Beyond Stereotypes



Learning about different cultures is important for understanding the different kinds of people we work with. However, leadership coaches Keith Caver and Ancella Livers caution that people are individuals, not just representatives of a cultural group. Based on their work with African American executives and middle managers, Caver and Livers have found that co-workers sometimes treat these individuals first as representatives of black culture, and only second as talented and experienced managers.

As an example, Caver and Livers cite the all-too-common situation of a newly hired black manager who participates in a management development activity. The new manager is prepared to answer questions about her area of business expertise, but the only questions directed toward her are about diversity. African American clients of Caver and Livers have complained that they are often called upon to interpret the behavior of famous black Americans such as Clarence Thomas or Jesse Jackson, and they wonder whether their race qualifies them to interpret the deeds of famous white Americans.

In this example, stereotypes make well-intentioned efforts at communication offensive. To avoid such offense, consider not only culture, but also people's individual qualities and their roles and experiences. A person who communicates one way in the role of son or daughter may communicate very differently as an engineer or client.

Adapted from Keith A. Caver and Ancella B. Livers, "Dear White Boss," *Harvard Business Review* 80, no. 11 (November 2002), 76–81.

Bilingual Canada has long compared the diversity of its people to a mosaic. But now immigrants from Italy, China, and the Middle East add their voices to the medley of French, English, and Inuit. CHIN Radio in Toronto offers information in more than 30 languages.²¹

According to 2010 U.S. census figures, about 9 million people identified themselves as belonging to two or more races.²² U.S. census figures also show that 20.0% of the population nationally and 43.1% in California speak a language other than English at home.²³ In cities such as Los Angeles and San Jose, over half the population speaks a language other than English at home (60.5% and 55.0%, respectively).²⁴

Faced with these figures, organizations are making special efforts to diversify their workforces. Microsoft, for instance, has 40 employee networks; in addition to various national heritage groups such as Arabs, Brazilians, and ex-Yugoslavians, they cover various family roles (working parents), disabilities (visually impaired persons), age groups (boomers), and backgrounds (U.S. military veterans). The groups help provide a sense of community and also provide resources for recruiting and training.²⁵

Diversified companies are smart; new evidence shows that diversity can improve business. Research analyzing the relationship between diversity levels and business performance of 250 U.S. businesses found a correlation between diversity and business success; companies with high levels of racial and ethnic minorities have the highest profits, market shares, and number of customers. On the other hand, organizations with low levels of diversity have the lowest profits, market shares, and number of customers.²⁶ When the Supreme Court heard arguments on considering race as a factor in admissions at the University of Texas, 57 companies, including Aetna, Dow Chemical, General Electric, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, and Walmart, filed a brief arguing that a diverse workforce helps profits.²⁷

Ways to Look at Culture

Each of us grows up in a culture that provides patterns of acceptable behavior and belief. We may not be aware of the most basic features of our own culture until we come into contact with people who do things differently. In India, children might be expected to touch the bare feet of elders to show respect, but in the United States such touching would be inappropriate.²⁸

Anthropologist Edward Hall first categorized cultures as high-context or low-context, categories that are popular in the business milieu, although no longer in vogue in anthropology. In **high-context cultures**, most of the information is inferred from the social relationships of the people and the context of a message; little is explicitly conveyed. Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Latin American cultures are high-context. In **low-context cultures**, context is less important; most information is explicitly spelled out. German, Scandinavian, and North American cultures are low-context.

High- and low-context cultures value different kinds of communication and have different attitudes toward oral and written communication. As Figure 7.1 shows, low-context cultures like those of the United States favor direct approaches and may see indirectness as dishonest or manipulative. The written word is seen as more important than oral statements, so contracts are binding but promises may be broken. Details matter. Business communication practices in the United States reflect these low-context preferences.

Figure 7.1

Views of Communication in High- and Low-Context Cultures

	High-context (Examples: Japan, Saudi Arabia)	Low-context (Examples: Germany, North America)
Preferred communication strategy	Indirectness, politeness, ambiguity	Directness, confrontation, clarity
Reliance on words to communicate	Low	High
Reliance on nonverbal signs to communicate	High	Low
Importance of relationships	High	Low
Importance of written word	Low	High
Agreements made in writing	Not binding	Binding
Agreements made orally	Binding	Not binding
Attention to detail	Low	High

Another way of looking at cultures is by using Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Based on data collected by IBM, Hofstede's five dimensions are power/inequality, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation. They are now applied to 74 countries and regions. To illustrate, Hofstede analyzes the United States as extremely high in individualism, but also high in masculinity, with men dominating a significant portion of the power structure. It has a lower power-distance index, indicating more equality at all social levels. It also has a lower uncertainty avoidance index, meaning it has fewer rules and greater tolerance for a variety of ideas and beliefs than do many countries.²⁹

The discussion that follows focuses on national and regional cultures. But business communication is also influenced by the organizational culture and by personal culture, such as gender, race and ethnicity, social class, and so forth. As Figure 7.2 suggests, all of these intersect to determine what kind of communication is needed in a given situation. Sometimes one kind of culture may be more important than another. For example, in a study of aerospace engineers in Europe, Asia, and the United States, researchers found that the similarities of the professional discourse community outweighed differences in national cultures.³⁰

Figure 7.2

National Culture, Organizational Culture, and Personal Culture Overlap



A \$28 Billion Cross-Cultural Mistake



When Daimler-Benz and Chrysler proposed a \$36 billion merger in 1998, both parties thought it was a good plan.

The merger was supposed to strengthen each other's place in the automotive market. But in 2007, a third party, Cerberus Capital Management, bought Daimler-Chrysler for just \$7.4 billion. What went wrong?

The cultural differences reflected in the practices of the two companies were a significant factor. For example, the German workers of Daimler-Benz were used to daily, company-sanctioned beer breaks while the American workers worried that alcohol consumption during work would lead to accidents and legal suits.

In addition, the German professionals were used to a formal, hierarchical structure in the organization and formal business attire.

Differences in the corporate lifestyle later led to questions as to who got the better end of the deal. U.S. assembly line workers earned more wages per hour than their German counterparts. However, the German workers, who received a six-week annual vacation, fully paid health care and education, and a triennial soul-soothing spa break, undoubtedly had a better benefits package.

In addition, while the Daimler plant produced 850,000 vehicles a year with 120,000 employees, Chrysler manufactured 3 million with approximately the same number of employees. These cultural differences eventually overshadowed the positives of this merger.

Adapted from Associated Press, "A Chronology in the Takeover Saga of Global Automaker DaimlerChrysler AG," *Associated Press Archive*, May 14, 2007; Roberto A. Weber and Colin F. Camerer, "Cultural Conflict and Merger Failure: An Experimental Approach," *Management Science* 49, no. 4 (2003).

Values, Beliefs, and Practices LO 7-3

Values and beliefs, often unconscious, affect our response to people and situations. Most North Americans, for example, value "fairness." "You're not playing fair" is a sharp criticism calling for changed behavior. In some countries, however, people expect certain groups to receive preferential treatment. Many people in the United States value individualism. Other countries may value the group. Japan's traditional culture emphasized the group, although there is evidence that this cultural value is changing.

Social relationships, which vary widely by country, also affect business communications. In countries such as Brazil and Saudi Arabia, where obligations to family and friends are extremely important, phone calls or even visits from family and friends may interrupt business meetings. In Saudi Arabia, segregation of women is so complete that a man and a woman should not be seen together in public unless married or family. In 2008, even France's president was asked not to bring his fiancée with him on a visit. Some buildings have elevators segregated by gender.³¹

Religion also affects business communication and business life. Practicing Muslims, Jews, and Christians observe days of rest and prayer on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, respectively. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunup to sundown; scheduling a business luncheon with a Muslim colleague during Ramadan would be inappropriate.

Even everyday practices differ from culture to culture. North Americans and Europeans put the family name last; Asians put it first. North American and European printing moves from left to right; Arabic reads from right to left. In the United States, a meeting on the fourth floor is actually on the fourth floor; in England, it is actually on the fifth floor of the building, because the British distinguish between ground and first floors. In China, the building may not have a fourth floor, because the word for *four* sounds like the word for *death*, so the number is considered unlucky.³²

Food practices can lead to interesting business meals, with different ways of eating. Food delicacies also vary widely by country. In China you might eat scorpions, kidney pie in England, snails in France, durian in Indonesia, grasshoppers in Mexico, sheep's head in Saudi Arabia, and haggis in Scotland. Remember that our consumption of pork would horrify many Muslims, while our consumption of beef would disgust many Indians.³³

Common business practices also differ among cultures (see Figure 7.3). In Middle Eastern—or predominantly Muslim—countries, business cards are exchanged only with the right hand, never with the "unclean" left hand. Cards should not be kept or put in a pigskin case; in India, avoid leather cases, also. In China, business cards are exchanged with both hands; they are complimented and put in a card case. In Russia, where hierarchy is important, cards should show your status by including items such as your title and the founding date of your company. In India, where education is specially valued, your card might show your graduate degrees.³⁴

In today's electronically connected world, cultural practices can change swiftly. For instance, in China, where age has traditionally been revered, few political or business leaders now turn gray, even those who are in their fifties or sixties. Workers are also becoming less group oriented and more individualistic.³⁵ In such fluid contexts, communication becomes even more important. If you don't know, ask.

Nonverbal Communication LO 7-4

Chapter 4 discussed the significance of nonverbal communication in interpersonal communication. **Nonverbal communication** is also important in intercultural settings. Be aware of usage differences in such areas as body language, touch, space, and time.

Figure 7.3**Customs for Business Meetings**

Country	Icebreakers	Openers	Punctuality	Standing space bubble	Greeting	Faux pas
Brazil	Soccer	Some small talk	You should be punctual; your contact may be 15–60 minutes late.	Less than one foot	Extended handshake; after acquaintance, embraces and air kisses	Refusing invitation to eat
China	Chinese discoveries and innovations	Research your contacts; they will have researched you. Show your awareness of a mutual interest.	Very important	2.5–3 feet	Slight bow; sometimes just a nod. With foreigners, handshake may follow bow.	Omitting official titles
Germany	Sports, international affairs, German literature	Maybe small talk, maybe straight to business. If small talk, discuss local culture, sites, food, beverages.	Of major importance. Arrive a few minutes early.	About 6 inches beyond handshake distance	Firm, brief handshake with direct eye contact but not a big smile	Using humor in business affairs; referring to Third Reich
India	Trade event, the specific city, Indian culture	Trading of information about hobbies, travels, maybe some about your family	You should be punctual. Allow time for traffic jams.	2–2.5 feet. May move closer after initial greeting	Some businessmen will shake hands. A more common greeting among Indians is the <i>namaste</i> .*	Referring to caste system, Pakistan, or infrastructure
Japan	Many personal questions to ascertain your place in hierarchy	Try to establish pleasant mood rather than conveying lots of facts	Arrive 5–10 minutes early	Start 2.5–3 feet apart to leave room for the bow.	Enthusiastic verbal greeting. Many degrees of bowing (from the waist). Handshakes are gentle and last 5 seconds or more.	Not having a significant gift to exchange; prolonged eye contact
Russia	Russian cultural and scientific achievements	Explain your position with great clarity, evidence, and firmness.	Be punctual; your host may be 15 minutes late.	About 1.5 feet	Handshake with extended direct eye contact	Whistling, standing with hands in pockets
Saudi Arabia	Soccer or racing	Extensive inquiries into your journey, family; inquiring how host started in industry and became successful	Be punctual, but punctuality is not a virtue for natives.	About one foot; do not back away to increase space	Several styles of greeting currently in use; let your counterpart initiate	Misusing images of their flag; inquiries about women in general, host's female family members in particular

*Namaste: palms together in front of chest, fingertips just below chin. Head may nod slightly.

Source: Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway, *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: Sales and Marketing: The Essential Cultural Guide—from Presentations and Promotions to Communicating and Closing* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012).

Communicating with Subsistence Consumers



Subsistence consumers may earn little money, but they still need to buy necessities. Corporations are learning how best to communicate with them.

Many of them lack basic reading skills, so visual cues are important. Cues such as store layout, package design, and brand logos need to remain consistent for them. Many buy products that look attractive because of packaging colors or pictures. They also tend to buy only brands they recognize by appearance, so changes in colors or visual design have negative impacts.

To better serve these customers, stores need to

- Display pictures of product categories, so shoppers can find the goods they need.
- Sell products in small quantities, including single-use or daily quantities.
- Provide easy-to-use packaging that keeps products safe in local conditions such as high humidity and lack of refrigeration.
- Price products in whole or half numbers, and display these prices graphically—such as a picture of the money needed to buy the product.
- Train store personnel to form relationships with consumers and offer friendly, individualized assistance.
- Capitalize on local social networks and word-of-mouth communications.

Adapted from Jose Antonio Rosa, Madhubalan Viswanathan, and Julie A. Ruth, "Emerging Lessons: For Multinational Companies, Understanding the Needs of Poorer Consumers Can Be Profitable and Socially Responsible," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2008, R12; and Kelly L. Weidner, Jose Antonio Rosa, and Madhu Viswanathan, "Marketing to Subsistence Consumers: Lessons from Practice," *Journal of Business Research*, 63, no. 6 (2010): 659–69.

Body Language

Just as verbal languages differ, so body languages differ from culture to culture. The Japanese value the ability to sit quietly. They may see the U.S. tendency to fidget and shift as an indication of lack of mental or spiritual balance. Even in North America, interviewers and audiences usually respond negatively to nervous gestures such as fidgeting with a tie or hair or jewelry, tapping a pencil, or swinging a foot.

People use body language to signal such traits as interest, respect, emotional involvement, confidence, and agreement. Among Arab men, for instance, holding hands is an expression of affection and solidarity. Americans working in the Middle East are cautioned to avoid pointing their finger at people or showing the soles of their feet when seated.³⁶ Bill Gates made international news when he greeted the president of South Korea by shaking her hand with one hand and keeping his other hand in his pocket (a sign of disrespect in South Korea).

Eye Contact North American whites see eye contact as a sign of attention; in fact, lack of eye contact is slightly suspect. But in many cultures, dropped eyes are a sign of appropriate deference to a superior. Japanese show respect by lowering their eyes when speaking to superiors. In some Latin American and African cultures, such as Nigeria, it is disrespectful for lower-status people to prolong eye contact with their superiors. Similarly, in the United States, staring is considered rude. For the English, however, polite people pay strict attention to speakers and blink their eyes to show understanding. In China, a widening of the eyes shows anger, in the United States—surprise. Among Arab men, eye contact is important; it is considered impolite not to face someone directly.³⁷ In Muslim countries, women and men are not supposed to have eye contact.

These differences can lead to miscommunication in the multicultural workplace. Superiors may feel that subordinates are being disrespectful when the subordinates are being fully respectful—according to the norms of their culture.

Facial Expression The frequency of smiling and the way people interpret smiles may depend on the purpose smiles serve in a particular culture. In the United States, smiling varies from region to region. In Germany, Sweden, and the "less-smiley" U.S. cultures, smiling is more likely to be reserved for close relationships and genuine joy. Frequent smiles in other situations would therefore seem insincere. For other people, including those in Thailand, smiling can be a way to create harmony and make situations pleasant.

Research has shown that when they are interpreting emotions, Americans focus on the mouth, so smiles are important. Japanese often focus on the eyes. This distinction is apparent even in their emoticons. Americans use :) for a happy face and :(for a sad one; Japanese use ^-^ for a happy face and ;-; for a sad one.³⁸

Gestures U.S. citizens sometimes assume that they can depend on gestures to communicate if language fails. But the meanings of gestures vary widely in different cultures. Kissing is usually an affection gesture in the United States but is a greeting gesture in other countries. In Greece, people may nod their heads to signify *no* and shake their heads to signify *yes*.³⁹

Gestures that mean approval in the United States may have very different meanings in other countries. The "thumbs up" sign, which means "good work" or "go ahead" in the United States and most of Western Europe, is a vulgar insult in Iraq, Iran, and Bangladesh. The circle formed with the

thumb and first finger that means OK in the United States is obscene in Brazil and Germany. In India, the raised middle finger means you need to urinate.⁴⁰

The V-sign is another gesture with multiple meanings. Made with the palm facing out, it was famously used by Churchill during WWII and by the hippies in the '60s and '70s. Made with the palm facing in, it is the equivalent of giving someone the finger in countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia. An American president made interesting headlines when he inadvertently used the V-sign on a visit to Australia.

Movements from other body parts besides the hands can also be significant. In Saudi Arabia, where feet are unclean, it would be highly improper to nudge anyone with your foot, or to sit with your legs crossed in a way that shows the sole of your shoe.⁴¹

Touch

Repeated studies have shown that babies need to be touched to grow and thrive and that older people are healthier both mentally and physically if they are touched. But some people are more comfortable with touch than others. Each kind of person may misinterpret the other. A person who dislikes touch may seem unfriendly to someone who's used to touching. A toucher may seem overly familiar to someone who dislikes touch.

Many parts of North America allow opposite-sex couples to hold hands or walk arm-in-arm in public but frown on the same behavior in same-sex couples. People in some other countries have the opposite expectation: male friends or female friends can hold hands or walk arm-in-arm, but an opposite-sex couple should not touch in public.

In U.S. business settings, people generally shake hands when they meet, but little other touching is considered appropriate. In Mexico, greetings may involve greater physical contact. Men may embrace one another, and women may kiss one another. In many European settings, business colleagues may shake hands when they encounter one another throughout the day. In countries along the Mediterranean, hugs and shoulder pats are common as well. In some European countries, greetings include light kisses. The typical pattern is to kiss the person's right cheek and then the left (or to kiss the air near the cheek). In Italy this pattern stops with two kisses; Belgians continue for three, and the French for four.⁴²

Space

Personal space is the distance people want between themselves and other people in ordinary, nonintimate interchanges. Some research shows that many North Americans, North Europeans, and Asians want a bigger personal space than do many Latin Americans, French, Italians, and Arabs. Even people who prefer lots of personal space are often forced to accept close contact on a crowded elevator or subway, or in a small conference room.

Even within a culture, some people like more personal space than do others. In many cultures, people who are of the same age and sex take less personal space than do mixed-age or mixed-sex groups.

Time

Differences in time zones complicate international phone calls and videoconferences. But even more important are different views of time and attitudes toward time. Offices in the United States keep time by the calendar and

Nonverbal Communication Tips for China



- If you are going to shake hands with your boss, you must initiate the handshake; use a gentle, almost limp, hand to show respect. Some Chinese do not like to shake hands; in that case, use a small bow.
- Make sure you have a professional business card, and show you are impressed by others' business cards. Treat their cards with admiration and respect.
- Small gifts are expected. Give something like a watch (not too fancy, but a known Western brand), but never a clock (associated with death).
- Numbers have meaning. Four is unlucky, because it sounds like *death*, so you would never give anyone a set of four objects. Eight is lucky because it sounds like *wealth*.
- Do not point at someone to get their attention; that is considered a rude gesture. Instead, gracefully wave them over with your whole hand.
- Be aware that drinking and smoking are considered a normal part of business.
- Be prepared to eat foods that you are not familiar with, like offal (entrails and inner organs of animals). Fish heads, however, should be reserved for the most important person at the table.

Adapted from Eric Spitznagel, "Impress Your Chinese Boss," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, January 9, 2012, 80-81.

Chinese Brand Names



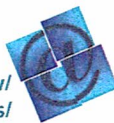
Companies may struggle with brand name interpretations when introducing new products to another country. This can be especially difficult when bringing a new product to China, where the language has thousands of characters.

Ideally, the Chinese name that is chosen will sound like the original and mean the same thing, but that ideal can be difficult to achieve. Companies naming products for the Chinese market have four approaches:

- No resemblance in sound or meaning: Pizza Hut's Chinese name means "Guarantee Wins Guests."
- Only sounds similar: Sony's Chinese name sounds similar, but means "Exploring Nun or Priest."
- Means the same but sounds different: General Motors chose this option.
- Sounds and means the same: Nike's Chinese name sounds like "Nike" and means, "Endurance Conquer."

Adapted from Marc Fetscherin, Ilan Alon, Romie Littrell, and Allan Chan, "In China? Pick Your Brand Name Carefully," *Harvard Business Review* 90, no. 9 (September 2012): 26.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>



World Factbook published by the Central Intelligence Agency is a good starting point for learning about the people of another country. Extensive country-by-country information includes history, government, and economics.

the clock. Being "on time" is seen as a sign of dependability. Other cultures may keep time by the seasons, the moon, the sun, internal "body clocks," or a personal feeling that "the time is right."

North Americans who believe that "time is money" are often frustrated in negotiations with people who take a much more leisurely approach. Part of the problem is that people in many other cultures want to establish a personal relationship before they decide whether to do business with each other.

The problem is made worse because various cultures mentally measure time differently. Many North Americans measure time in five-minute blocks. Someone who's five minutes late to an appointment or a job interview feels compelled to apologize. If the executive or interviewer is running half an hour late, the caller expects to be told about the likely delay upon arriving. Some people won't be able to wait that long and will need to reschedule their appointments. But in other cultures, half an hour may be the smallest block of time. To someone who mentally measures time in 30-minute blocks, being 45 minutes late is no worse than being 10 minutes late is to someone who is conscious of smaller units.

Different cultures have different lead times for scheduling events. In some countries, you need to schedule important meetings at least two weeks in advance. In other countries, not only are people not booked up so far in advance, but a date two weeks into the future may be forgotten.

Anthropologist Edward Hall distinguishes between **monochronic cultures**, which focus on clock time, and **polychronic cultures**, which focus on relationships. People in monochronic cultures tend to schedule their time and do one task at a time; people in polychronic cultures tend to want their time unstructured and do multiple tasks at the same time. When U.S. managers feel offended because a Latin American manager also sees other people during "their" appointments, the two kinds of time are in conflict.⁴³



Eating pizza with chopsticks illustrates how new cultural values interact with native culture to constantly create hybrid cultures.

Other Nonverbal Symbols

Many other symbols can carry non-verbal meanings: clothing, colors, age, and height, to name a few.

Clothing In North America, certain styles and colors of clothing are considered more professional and credible. Some clothing denotes not only status but also occupational group. Cowboy boots, firefighter hats, and judicial robes all may, or may not, signal specific occupations. Tool belts, coveralls, hard hats, and stethoscopes may signal broader occupational groupings.

Colors Colors can also carry meanings in a culture. Chinese tradition associates red with good fortune. Korean Buddhists use red to announce death. Black is the color of

joy in Japan, the color of death in the United States.⁴⁴ White is the color of funerals in Eastern countries; in the United States it is the color of brides. UPS found its company color working against it when it entered the Spanish market. The brown trucks that distinguish the delivery company's brand in the United States are not a good image in Spain, where hearses are traditionally brown. When UPS realized its mistake, it altered its uniforms and truck colors in Spain, emphasizing the company logo rather than the color brown.⁴⁵

Age In the United States, youth is valued. People color their hair and even have face-lifts to look as youthful as possible. In Japan, younger people generally defer to older people. Americans attempting to negotiate in Japan are usually taken more seriously if at least one member of the team is noticeably gray-haired.

Height Height connotes status in many parts of the world. Executive offices are usually on the top floors; the underlings work below. Even being tall can help a person succeed. A recent study found that white, non-Hispanic males of below-average height earned 10% less than males of above-average height. Each additional inch of height was linked to 2.5% greater income. Perhaps surprisingly, the measurement that produced this effect was the man's height when he was a teenager. Those who grew later in life did not enjoy the income benefits of greater height. For white women in the study, actual adult height was associated with greater income. The researchers lacked sufficient data on other ethnic groups except to say that there seems to be a height-income effect for black males that resembles the effect for white males.⁴⁶

Oral Communication LO 7-5

Effective oral communication requires cultural understanding. In Japan, for instance, much information is transmitted nonverbally and indirectly. Subtlety and restraint are important; what is not said is just as important as what is said. Japanese are comfortable with silence, and pauses of 10 to 15 seconds are not uncommon.⁴⁷

As Figure 7.3 suggests, even an act as specific as a business introduction may differ across cultures. These are general patterns, not absolutes, but they help communicators stay alert for audience preferences.

During business meetings, even words as distinct as *yes* and *no* may cause confusion. In some cultures where saying *no* is considered rude, a *yes* may mean merely "I heard you."

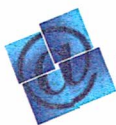
Learning at least a little of the language of the country where you hope to do business will help you in several ways. First, learning the language will give you at least a glimpse into the culture. Second, learning some of the language will help you manage the daily necessities of finding food and getting where you need to go while you're there. Finally, in business negotiations, knowing a little of the language gives you more time to think. You'll catch part of the meaning when you hear your counterpart speak; you can begin thinking even before the translation begins.

Frequently you will need good translators when you travel abroad on business. Brief them with the technical terms you'll be using; explain as much of the context of your negotiations as possible. A good translator can also help you interpret nonverbal behavior and negotiating strategies. Some translators can help their clients establish trust and credibility with international businesses.

<http://www.cyborlink.com/>

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/>

Cyborlink.com and Kwintessential.co.uk provide information on business communication in various countries. On both sites, choose a country to explore and you will get general information on topics such as negotiations, gift giving, personal space, and much more.



Safety Problem: Multiple Languages



All mining is dangerous, but platinum mining is particular so. The mineral is frequently a mile below the surface and in very hard rock.

Safety at Anglo American Platinum's mines was further complicated by lack of a common language. Workers, who come from various countries and tribes, speak a dozen languages and are frequently not able to warn each other of dangers.

For more than a hundred years, Anglo has taught its miners Fanagolo, a 200-word pidgin language created for mining tasks. But today's workers find the language racially offensive.

Now Anglo is offering English and Afrikaans classes, and encouraging all its miners to learn one of the two languages.

Adapted from Robert Guy Matthews, "A Mile Down, Saving Miners' Lives," *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2010, B1.

Understatement and Exaggeration

To understand someone from another culture, you must understand the speaker's conversational style. The British have a reputation for understatement. Someone good enough to play at Wimbledon may say he or she "plays a little tennis." In many contexts, Americans accept exaggeration as a way to express positive thinking. Particularly in advertising, Americans expect some hype. Germans, in contrast, generally see exaggeration as a barrier to clear communication.⁴⁸

Compliments

The kinds of statements that people interpret as compliments and the socially correct ways to respond to compliments also vary among cultures. Statements that seem complimentary in one context may be inappropriate in another. For example, women in business may be uncomfortable if male colleagues or superiors compliment them on their appearance: the comments may suggest that the women are being treated as visual decoration rather than as contributing workers.

Approaches to Negatives

Cultures also vary in the way they deal with unpleasant details. In Brazil and India, unpleasantness is suppressed, so a negative response would probably be indirect. It may be a statement that the issue or action is complicated, or an off-topic remark, such as one about a restaurant. To save face in Japan, bad news is never delivered in front of a group. In Saudi Arabia, face saving is also important, so again blunt *no*'s are rare. A polite *yes* may frequently be a *no*. A true *yes* will be followed by action such as a request for information or an appointment with a lawyer. Negative information is delivered through intermediaries.⁴⁹

Writing to International Audiences LO 7-6

Cultural preferences are also important in written documents. Germans, for instance, have a reputation for appreciating technical data and scientific detail. They are likely to be intolerant of claims that seem logically unsupported. An American writing for a German audience should ensure that any claims are literally true.⁵⁰ The Muslim calendar, the Hijri, is a lunar one of 354 days. Paperwork for Saudi businesses might carry two sets of dates: Western dates, designated C.E. (Common Era), and Muslim dates, designated H. (Hijri).⁵¹

Most cultures are more formal in their writing than the United States. When you write to international audiences, you may need to use titles, not first names. Avoid contractions, slang, idioms, and sports metaphors.

Not: Let's knock these sales figures out of the ballpark.

But: Our goal is to increase sales 7%.

Do write in English unless you're extremely fluent in your reader's language. Be clear, but be adult. Don't write in second-grade English.

Not: We will meet Tuesday. Our meeting room will be Hanscher North. We will start at 9:30 AM.

But: We will meet Tuesday at 9:30 AM in Hanscher North.



Disaster communications that cross cultures have many complexities, but Apple CEO Steve Jobs wrote a message that moved audiences in multiple cultures. See "Communicating Compassion" sidebar on this page.

ship may be far more important than the actual contract, which may not even be considered binding.

In other documents, negative messages may need more buffering and requests may need to be indirect. A U.S. manager asking a direct question in an e-mail ("Were the contract numbers checked against Accounting's figures?") could cause hurt feelings among some international recipients, who might take the question as an accusation.

As Figures 7.4 and 7.5 suggest, the style, structure, and strategies that would motivate a U.S. audience may need to be changed for international readers. Relationships become more important, as do politeness strategies. The information in the figures suggests general patterns, not definitive delineations, but such suggestions help communicators look for ways to be more effective.

Figure 7.4 Cultural Contrasts in Oral Communication

	United States	Europe	Asia
Opening a conversation	Take the initiative	England: take the initiative	Japan: wait for an invitation to speak
Interrupting	Wait until speaker finishes	Italy: interruptions common; more than one person may speak at once	Japan: do not interrupt; silent periods common
Vocal characteristics	Modulated pace and volume	Spaniards may speak louder than the French	Indians speak English much faster than Americans
Disagreements	Stated calmly and directly	Spain: often accompanied by emotional outbursts	Japan: often communicated by silence
Praise	Key motivational factor	Russia: saved for extraordinary behavior, otherwise seen as false	Indonesia: may be offensive (suggests supervisor surprised by good job)

Source: Adapted from Richard M. Steers, Carlos J. Sanchez-Runde, and Luciana Nardon. *Management across Cultures: Challenges and Strategies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 222–23.

Communicating Compassion



When the 2011 earthquake and tsunami struck Japan, Apple was preparing to release its latest version of the popular iPad there. It was a critical time for the company's continued success. Hours after the earthquake, however, Apple suspended the iPad's launch, and all its employees in Japan received this message from CEO Steve Jobs:

"To Our Team in Japan,

We have all been following the unfolding disaster in Japan. Our hearts go out to you and your families, as well as all of your countrymen who have been touched by this tragedy.

If you need time or resources to visit or care for your families, please see HR and we will help you. If you are aware of any supplies that are needed, please also tell HR and we will do what we can to arrange delivery.

Again, our hearts go out to you during this unimaginable crisis. Please stay safe."

The message itself was important—a statement of compassion from the CEO. But the way Apple continued to respond made the difference for thousands of employees and even more nonemployees. In cities with no power or Internet, Apple's self-contained stores stayed open, providing free wireless access, computer access, phone calls, charging stations, food, and places to sleep for stranded employees. Hundreds crowded into the stores to contact family and friends.

In high-context cultures like Japan's, which place great importance on actions and personal relationships, Apple's response to the disaster was admirable. The message from Jobs and the actions of local employees who helped thousands of people were compassionate gestures from a truly international company.

Adapted from "Steve Jobs Responds to Japan Quake," *International Business Times*, March 17, 2011, <http://www.ibtimes.com/steve-jobs-responds-japan-quake-276013#>; and Josh Ong, "Japan Apple Stores Serve as Rallying Point after Massive Quake," *Apple Insider*, March 14, 2011, http://appleinsider.com/articles/11/03/14/japan_apple_stores_serve_as_rallying_point_after_massive_quake.

Figure 7.5**Cultural Contrasts in Written Persuasive Documents**

	United States	Japan	Arab countries
Opening	Request action or get reader's attention	Offer thanks; apologize	Offer personal greetings
Way to persuade	Immediate gain or loss of opportunity	Waiting	Personal connections; future opportunity
Style	Short sentences	Modesty; minimize own standing	Elaborate expressions; many signatures
Closing	Specific request	Desire to maintain harmony	Future relationship, personal greeting
Values	Efficiency, directness, action	Politeness, indirectness, relationship	Status, continuation

Source: Adapted from Farid Elashmawi and Philip R. Harris, *Multicultural Management 2000: Essential Cultural Insights for Global Business Success* (Houston: Gulf, 1998), 139.

IBM in Africa

IBM would like to use its products and consulting experience to help Africa increase crop yields, power grid performance, and government efficiency.

Many parts of Africa desperately need this help. In various cities and town, thousands of people live in shacks made out of plastic tarps and old iron, living on very small amounts of water. In the city of Tshwane in South Africa, a quarter of the city's water supply is wasted due to leaking water tanks. IBM sent a team to do a free analysis of Tshwane's water system in order to build a business relationship with the local government.

IBM's revenue from Africa was \$400 million in 2012 and is expected to more than double in a few years. If so, this growth will be even faster than sales growth in India was.

Working in Africa can be a risky venture for businesses, however. Because so many African governments are new and subject to failure, establishing a business relationship with them can be difficult.

Adapted from Sarah Frier, "Things Fall Apart. IBM Is Here to Help," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, February 25–March 3, 2013, 28–29.

Most writers will benefit from researching a culture before composing messages for people in it.

Response time expectations may also need to be modified. U.S. employees tend to expect fast answers to e-mails. However, other cultures with hierarchical organization structures may need extra response time to allow for approval by superiors. Pressing for a quick response may alienate the people whose help is needed and may result in false promises.⁵²

In international business correspondence, list the day before the month:

Not: April 8, 2008

But: 8 April 2008

Spell out the month to avoid confusion.

Businesspeople from Europe and Japan who correspond frequently with North America are beginning to adopt U.S. directness and patterns of organization. Still, it may be safer to modify your message somewhat; it certainly is more courteous.

Learning More about International Business Communication LO 7-7

Learning to communicate with people from different backgrounds shouldn't be a matter of learning rules. Instead, use the examples in this chapter to get a sense for the kinds of factors that differ from one culture to another. Test these generalizations against your experience. Remember that people everywhere have their own personal characteristics. And when in doubt, ask.

You can also learn by seeking out people from other backgrounds and talking with them. Many campuses have centers for international students. Some communities have groups of international businesspeople who meet regularly to discuss their countries. By asking all these people what aspects of the dominant U.S. culture seem strange to them, you'll learn much about what is "right" in their cultures.

Summary by Learning Objectives

LO 7-1 Why global business is important.

Exports are essential both to the success of individual businesses and to a country's economy as a whole. Even many small businesses have global supply chains.

LO 7-2 Why diversity is becoming more important.

Research has found a correlation between diversity and business success; companies with high levels of racial and ethnic minorities have the highest profits, the highest market shares, and highest number of customers.

LO 7-3 How our values and beliefs affect our responses to other people.

Although often unconscious, our values and beliefs impact our cross-cultural communications. Religious beliefs, social values, even everyday practices, all impact communication.

LO 7-4 How nonverbal communication impacts cross-cultural communications.

Nonverbal communication is communication that doesn't use words. Nonverbal communication can include body language, space, time, and other miscellaneous matters such as clothing, colors, age, and height.

Nonverbal signals can be misinterpreted just as easily as can verbal symbols (words). For instance, no gesture has a universal meaning across all cultures. Gestures that signify approval in North America may be insults in other countries, and vice versa.

LO 7-5 How to adapt oral communication for cross-cultural communications.

Learning a little of the language of the country helps, as does a good translator. Be particularly careful of compliments and approaches to negatives.

LO 7-6 How to adapt written communications for global audiences.

Cultural preferences are also important in written documents. Most cultures are more formal in their writing than the United States. Also, the patterns of organization that work for North American audiences may need to be modified in international correspondence.

LO 7-7 Why it is important to check cultural generalizations.

The successful intercultural communicator is

- Aware of the values, beliefs, and practices in other cultures.
- Sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture.
- Aware that his or her preferred values and behaviors are influenced by culture and are not necessarily "right."
- Sensitive to verbal and nonverbal behavior.
- Willing to ask about preferences and behaviors.
- Flexible and open to change.

Continuing Case

The All-Weather Case, set in an HR department in a manufacturing company, extends through all 19 chapters and is available at www.mhhe.com/locker11e. The portion for this chapter asks students to research and then write on Japanese customs.

Exercises and Cases

*Go to www.mhhe.com/locker11e for additional Exercises and Cases.

7.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. Why is global business important? (LO 7-1)
2. What are the advantages of receiving an overseas assignment? (LO 7-1)
3. Why is diversity becoming more important than ever before? (LO 7-2)
4. What are low-context and high-context cultures? (LO 7-3)
5. How do our values and beliefs affect our responses to other people? (LO 7-3)

6. What are some forms of nonverbal communication? What variations would you expect to see in them among people of different cultures? (LO 7-4)
7. Why do people from monochronic cultures sometimes have trouble with people from polychronic cultures? (LO 7-4)
8. What are some characteristics of oral communications you should consider when communicating cross-culturally? (LO 7-5)
9. What are some cautions to consider when writing for international audiences? (LO 7-6)
10. Why is it important to check cultural generalizations? (LO 7-7)

7.2 Identifying Sources of Miscommunication

In each of the following situations, identify one or more ways that cultural differences may be leading to miscommunication.

1. Alan is a U.S. sales representative in South America. He makes appointments and is careful to be on time. But the person he's calling on is frequently late. To save time, Alan tries to get right to business. But his hosts want to talk about sightseeing and his family. Even worse, his appointments are interrupted constantly, not only by business phone calls but also by long conversations with other people and even the customers' children who come into the office. Alan's first progress report is very negative. He hasn't yet made a sale. Perhaps South America just isn't the right place to sell his company's products.
2. To help her company establish a presence in Asia, Susan wants to hire a local interpreter who can advise her on business customs. Kana Tomari has superb qualifications on paper. But when Susan tries to probe about her experience, Kana just says, "I will do my best. I will try very hard." She never gives details about any of the previous positions she's held. Susan begins to wonder if the résumé is inflated.
3. Stan wants to negotiate a joint venture with an Asian company. He asks Tung-Sen Lee if the people have enough discretionary income to afford his product. Mr. Lee is silent for a time, and then says, "Your product is good. People in the West must like it." Stan smiles, pleased that Mr. Lee recognizes the quality of his product, and he gives Mr. Lee a contract to sign. Weeks later, Stan still hasn't heard anything. If Asians are going to be so nonresponsive, he wonders if he really should try to do business with them.
4. Elspeth is very proud of her participatory management style. On assignment in India, she is careful not to give orders but to ask for suggestions. But people rarely suggest anything. Even a formal suggestion system doesn't work. And to make matters worse, she doesn't sense the respect and camaraderie of the plant she managed in the United States. Perhaps, she decides gloomily, people in India just aren't ready for a woman boss.

7.3 Interviewing for Cultural Information

Interview a person from an international community about cross-cultural communication. You might want to discuss issues such as these:

- Verbal and nonverbal communication, including body language.
- Tone and organization of professional communications.

- Attitude toward materialism.
- Time awareness differences.
- Concepts of personal space.

Compare the person's responses with your own values and write an e-mail to your instructor reflecting on the similarities and differences.

7.4 Analyzing Ads

Go to <http://advertising.chinasmack.com/2011/weird-wonderful-chinese-advertising-of-2011.html>, which is a website that portrays advertisements from China. In small groups, choose one advertisement to analyze. Compare it to a similar ad created in the United States.

- What are some differences you see in the advertisement?
- What does the advertisement say about cultural values in the country it is from?

- What message is the advertisement sending about a particular product or company?
 - Does the advertisement require an explanation for our understanding?
 - Would this particular advertisement be effective if shown in the United States?
- Discuss your findings in small groups. As a group, prepare a short presentation for your classmates.