



# Chapter 1 International Communication



## 1.1 The Concept of Global English

*What Is Global English?* Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why you have been learning English as a second language during the past 6 -10 years of your schooling? Global English is a concept that explains how English is being used as a tool for communication across the world. Although many college graduates in China will not use English everyday in their professional careers, English is an important tool for international communication. At the Beijing Capital Airport, it is not uncommon to observe groups of business professionals and tourists from various countries, such as China, Germany, Canada, Japan, India, Ghana or Kenya, all communicating with others using English. Although physical appearance may give away a person's nationality, all of those people are communicating in a common language: English. Most people that use the English language for communication are not native speakers of English, so a cultural understanding of the English language in a global context is necessary, along with a high level of language understanding and comprehension, for English to be used successfully as a medium for communication.

The implications of global English are many; successful communicators know how to use English as a bridge between their culture and another culture. To use English as a tool for international communication, a communicator can benefit not only from studying how English is used in their own culture or native-speaking cultures, but also from how English is used in other countries around the world. The concept of global English denotes that no single culture is the authority on the English language because so many professionals from all cultures and languages around the world use English to communicate. The globalization of English



means more work for the business professional because each culture must be understood before one jumps into a negotiation, discussion, or meeting. Do people in China use English differently from someone from Saudi Arabia or America? Of course they do! So, understanding Chinese English is just as important as understanding the English of native-speaking countries.

If someone uses English to communicate, the accent, pronunciation and regional dialect are not important factors; the message to the receiver is what is the most important. There is no absolutely correct or perfect English, there is only understanding the message. In other words, the message or “what” you say is the most important. How you say it (i.e. the pronunciation or accent) is less important for global communication, as long as pronunciation and accent do not impede communication. Of course to some degree, the speaker must understand English well enough so others from around the world can understand them, so developing pronunciation for understanding is essential. But if the speaker has good listening skills and receivers of the message understand the language, then pronunciation becomes less important.

So, when studying global English, it is imperative to learn about cultures from around the world for successful and effective communication. English has many practical applications for college graduates in China, especially for new professionals seeking jobs in international companies.

### Discussion Prompts

1. What is Global English? Has the international use of English changed the English language? If yes, in what ways has the language changed?
2. What is Chinese English? Are there differences between English slang words and Chinese English slang words? Please give a few examples. You may want to discuss the terms used to describe toilet facilities, such as “WC” in China, “restroom” or “bathroom” in America, or just the plain old “toilet” in Australia.
3. Are there differences between English slang words amongst various native English-speaking countries? Please give some examples.
4. Since many countries around the world use English as a second language, it has, to some degree, become the world’s second language. Do you agree or disagree that English should be the world’s second language? Which language would you suggest in its place? Use three main points to illustrate your argument.

## 1.2 Cross-Cultural Communication

**Source:** LeBaron, Michelle. 2003. “Cross-Cultural Communication.” *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. <[http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/cross-cultural\\_communication/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/cross-cultural_communication/)>. Posted July 2003.

### Cross-Cultural Communication

#### Michelle LeBaron

It is not just *what* is said, but *how* it is said. International employees that understand the following four concepts of cross-cultural communication often excel in their overseas transactions.

- A) Time and Space
- B) Fate and Personal Responsibility
- C) Face and Face-Saving
- D) Non-verbal Communication

As our familiarity with these different starting points increases, we are cultivating cultural fluency,



awareness of the ways cultures operate in communication and conflict, and the ability to respond effectively to these differences.

### **A) TIME**

Time is one of the most central differences that separate cultures and cultural ways of doing things. In the West, time tends to be seen as quantitative, measured in units that reflect the march of progress. It is logical, sequential, and present-focused, moving with incremental certainty toward a future the ego cannot touch and a past that is not a part of now. In the East, time feels like it has unlimited continuity, an unraveling rather than a strict boundary. Birth and death are not such absolute ends since the universe continues and humans, though changing form, continue as part of it. This may mean many conversations in a moment (such as a meeting in which people speak simultaneously, “talking over” each other as they discuss their subjects), or many times and people during one process (such as a ceremony in which those family members who have died are felt to be present as well as those yet to be born into the family).

A good place to look to understand the Eastern idea of time is India. There, time is seen to be moving endlessly through various cycles, becoming and vanishing. Time stretches far beyond the human ego or lifetime. There is a certain timeless quality to time, an aesthetic almost too intricate and vast for the human mind to comprehend. Consider this description of an aeon, the unit of time which elapses between the origin and destruction of a world system: “Suppose there is a mountain, of very hard rock, much bigger than the Himalayas; and suppose that a man, with a piece of the very finest cloth of Benares, once every century should touch that mountain ever so slightly — then the time it would take him to wear away the entire mountain would be about the time of an Aeon.”

It is also true that cultural approaches to time and communication are not always applied in good faith, but they may serve a variety of motives. Asserting power, superiority, advantage, or control over the course of the negotiations may be a motive wrapped up in certain cultural tactics. As people from different cultural backgrounds work together to design a process to address the issues that divide them, they can ask questions about cultural preferences about time and space and how these may affect a negotiation or conflict-resolution process, and thus inoculate against the use of culture as a tactic or an instrument to advance power.

Any example will show us only a glimpse of approaches to time as a confounding variable across cultures. In fact, ideas of time have a great deal of complexity buried within. Western concepts of time as a straight line emanating from no one in particular obscure the idea that there are purposive forces at work in time, a common idea in indigenous and Eastern ways of thought. From an Eastern or indigenous perspective, Spirit operates within space and time, so time is alive with purposes and specific meanings and may be discerned from events. A party to negotiate who subscribes to this idea of time may also have ideas about fate, destiny, and the importance of uncovered “right relationship” and “right action”. If time is a circle, an unravelled ball of twine, a spiral, an unfolding of stories already written, or a play in which much of the set is invisible, then relationships and meanings can be uncovered to inform current actions.

### **B) RESPONSIBILITY**

Another important variable affecting communication across cultures is fate and personal responsibility. This refers to the degree to which we feel ourselves as the masters of our lives, versus the degree to which we see ourselves as subject to things outside our control. Another way to look at this is to ask how much we see ourselves be able to change and maneuver, to choose the course of our lives and relationships. Some have drawn a parallel between the emphasis on personal responsibility in North American settings and the landscape itself. The North American landscape is vast, with large spaces of unpopulated territory. The frontier



mentality of “conquering” the wilderness, and the expansiveness of the land stretching huge distances, may relate to the general high level of confidence in the ability to shape and choose our destinies.

In this expansive landscape, many children grow up with an epic sense of life, where ideas are big, and hope springs eternal. When they experience setbacks, they are encouraged to redouble their efforts, to “try, try again.” Action, efficacy, and achievement are emphasized and expected. Free will is enshrined in laws and enforced by courts.

Now consider places in the world with much smaller territory, whose history reflects repeated conquest and harsh struggles: Northern Ireland, Mexico, Israel, and Palestine. In these places, there is more emphasis on destiny’s role in human life. In Mexico, there is a legacy of poverty, invasion, and territorial mutilation. Mexicans are more likely to see struggles as inevitable or unavoidable. Their fatalistic attitude is expressed in their way of responding to failure or accident by saying “ni modo” (“no way” or “tough luck”), meaning that the setback is destined.

### **C) SAVING FACE**

Face is important across cultures, yet the dynamics of face and face-saving play out differently. Face is defined in many different ways in the cross-cultural communication literature. In this broader definition, face includes ideas of status, power, courtesy, insider and outsider relations, humor, and respect. In many cultures, maintaining face is of great importance, though ideas of how to do this vary.

The starting points of individualism and communitarianism are closely related to face. If I see myself as a self-determining individual, then face has something to do with preserving my image with others and myself. I can and should exert control in situations to achieve this goal. I may do this by taking a competitive stance in negotiations or confronting someone who I perceive to have wronged me. I may be comfortable in a mediation where the other party and I meet face to face and frankly discuss our differences.

If I see my primary identity as a group member, then considerations about face involve my group. Direct confrontation or problem-solving with others may reflect poorly on my group, or disturb overall community harmony. I may prefer to avoid criticism of others, even when the disappointment I have concealed may come out in other more damaging ways later. When there is conflict that cannot be avoided, I may prefer a third party who acts as a shuttle between me and the other people involved in the conflict. Since no direct confrontation takes place, face is preserved and potential damage to the relationships and networks of relationships is minimized.

### **D) NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Non-verbal communication is hugely important in any interaction with others; its importance is multiplied across cultures. This is because we tend to look for non-verbal cues when verbal messages are unclear or ambiguous, as they are more likely to be across cultures (especially when different languages are being used). Since nonverbal behavior arises from our cultural common sense — our ideas about what is appropriate, normal, and effective as communication in relationships — we use different systems of understanding gestures, postures, silence, spatial relations, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance, and other non-verbal cues. Cultures also attribute different degrees of importance to verbal and non-verbal behavior.

Low-context cultures like the United States and Canada tend to give relatively less emphasis to non-verbal communication. This does not mean that non-verbal communication does not happen, or that it is unimportant, but that people in these settings tend to place less importance on it than on the literal meanings of words themselves. In high-context settings such as Japan or Colombia, understanding the non-verbal components of communication is relatively more important in receiving the intended meaning of the communication as a



whole.

Some elements of non-verbal communication are consistent across cultures. For example, research has shown that the emotions of enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise are expressed in similar ways by people around the world. Differences surface with respect to which emotions are acceptable to display in various cultural settings, and by whom. For instance, it may be more socially acceptable in some settings in the United States for women to show fear, but not anger, and for men to display anger, but not fear. At the same time, interpretation of facial expressions across cultures is difficult. In China and Japan, for example, a facial expression that would be recognized around the world as conveying happiness may actually express anger or mask sadness, both of which are unacceptable to show overtly.

These differences of interpretation may lead to conflict, or escalate existing conflict. Suppose a Japanese person is explaining her absence from negotiations due to a death in her family. She may do so with a smile, based on her cultural belief that it is not appropriate to inflict the pain of grief on others. For a Westerner who understands smiles to mean friendliness and happiness, this smile may seem incongruous and even cold, under the circumstances. Even though some facial expressions may be similar across cultures, their interpretations remain culture-specific. It is important to understand something about cultural starting-points and values in order to interpret emotions expressed in cross-cultural interactions.

Another variable across cultures has to do with proxemics, or ways of relating to space. Crossing cultures, we encounter very different ideas about polite space for conversations and negotiations. North Americans tend to prefer a large amount of space, perhaps because they are surrounded by it in their homes and countryside. Europeans tend to stand more closely with each other when talking, and are accustomed to smaller personal spaces. In a comparison of North American and French children on a beach, a researcher noticed that the French children tended to stay in a relatively small space near their parents, while U.S. children ranged up and down a large area of the beach.

The difficulty with space preferences is not that they exist, but the judgments that get attached to them. If someone is accustomed to standing or sitting very close when talking with another, he/she may see the other's attempt to create more space as evidence of coldness, condescension, or a lack of interest. Those who are accustomed to more personal space may view attempts to get closer as pushy, disrespectful, or aggressive. Neither is correct—they are simply different.

Also related to space is the degree of comfort we feel moving furniture or other objects. It is said that a German executive working in the United States became so upset with visitors to his office moving the guest chair to suit themselves that he had it bolted to the floor. Contrast this with U.S. and Canadian mediators and conflict-resolution trainers, whose first step in preparing a meeting is not infrequently a complete rearrangement of the furniture.

Finally, line-waiting behavior and behavior in group settings like grocery stores or government offices is culturally-influenced. Novinger reports that the English and U.S. Americans are serious about standing in lines, in accordance with their beliefs in democracy and the principle of "first come, first served." The French, on the other hand, have a practice of *resquillage*, or line jumping, which irritates many British and U.S. Americans. In another example, immigrants from Armenia report that it is difficult to adjust to a system of waiting in line, when their home context permits one member of a family to save spots for several others.

These examples of differences related to non-verbal communication are only the tip of the iceberg. Careful observation, ongoing studying from a variety of sources, and cultivating relationships across cultures will all help develop the cultural fluency to work effectively with non-verbal communication differences.



## Discussion Prompts

1. What are the four concepts of cross-cultural communication? Briefly elaborate on the meaning of each concept.
2. Please compare two different cultures' perceptions of time. What is your own culture's perception of time?
3. How can the concept of time influence the goals and work performance at a meeting with people from different cultures? For example, American employees might have the mind set of doing the job ethically and responsibly within the time frame. After the job is done, work is over. In other words, work occurs during working hours, while personal leisure time is completely separate. On the other hand, Chinese employees might see making and establishing relationships with the right people as more important than completing the specific task at hand. So, personal time and work time cross paths in order to establish the primary goal of forming relationships, which can offer social exchange opportunities or assistance at a later time.
4. Please explain your own concept of responsibility in terms of fate. Which influences your own fate more: personal choices/decisions or events beyond your control? Please discuss two reasons or examples.
5. Please compare and contrast North American perspectives on responsibility with the perspectives of your own culture.
6. Social responsibility is different in each culture. Some cultures do not directly address problems, because it may destroy group harmony, while other cultures need to directly address problems because it is seen as taking action to make things right (and the action of directly and openly addressing problems may also imply "honesty"). Failing to see it, a person may conclude that the second is lazy, obstructionist, or dishonest. The second person will expect respect for the natural order of things. Failing to see it, a person may conclude that the first is coercive or irreverent, inflated in their ideas of what can be accomplished or changed. Pick two countries with different concepts on social and personal responsibility and discuss what problems might occur if one enters a meeting not being aware of this cultural variable.
7. Discuss how the symbol of education may be viewed differently as an influence on cultural responsibility and on how one thinks. For example, in China, how important is it to be "number one" or score high on a test in high school? Do you think it is just as important to a British student in a British high school?
8. Face: If a culture believes that fate is self-determined and individuals have control over their futures, how might a person approach negotiations? Please describe how the person may approach a situation where someone has done something wrong to them? Would the person confront others?
9. Face: If a culture believes that maintaining group harmony is important (an individual's fate is influenced by other people), how might a person approach negotiations? Would the person use a third party to resolve conflicts? How can this method be used to "preserve face" or "save face"?
10. Saving face is very important in some cultures; it shows respect and responsibility. However, in other cultures saving face could be viewed as dishonesty. Please discuss a few examples where these concepts could be applied.
11. Sometimes, one gesture can be seen as appropriate in some cultures but offensive in other cultures. Discuss three non-verbal gestures which might be regarded as offensive in some cultures. Should these gestures be used in a global context for communication? Discuss several gestures that are universally accepted.
12. Explain how a personal space varies in two different cultures. During a conversation between two people from two different cultures, how might this difference in personal space result in misjudged feelings?
13. Please compare behaviors of waiting in line in three different cultures (the text compares U.S. and U.K. behaviors with French and Armenian concepts of line-waiting).



## 1.3 Non-Verbal Communication

### *Public Speaking*

Presentations are important for college students as well as professional employees. Students are often required to give class presentations to show professors that they have mastered the course content and can synthesize their own ideas with course lecture topics and information from the course book. Many college students will also give sales presentations to customers for part-time sales jobs; professional employees often give sales presentations for potential partner companies. So, public speaking is a valuable skill for both professional employees and college students. People give informal speeches and presentations all of the time: during everyday conversations, when having persuasive arguments with classmates, or even when answering a question. Presentations and speeches are natural media for communication, but to become an effective public speaker, one must learn to become aware of the purpose of their speeches/presentations, understand the audience, and be aware of one's self-composure and behaviors.

### *Culture and Public Speaking*

Professional presentations and speeches are well-organized media for sharing information and ideas. Presentations can be either formal, such as a company leader presenting a summary of annual accomplishments, or informal, such as an employee presenting a monthly summary of expenditures during a regularly scheduled meeting. Experienced presenters learn to be aware of the audience, general atmosphere, purpose, and settings of presentations. These factors can influence the effectiveness of presentations.

For example, if a Chinese foreign affairs representative of a university has an audience composed of mostly the parents of foreign college students, the presenter must be aware of the cultures from which the parents come from, the purpose and the atmosphere of the presentation, and the setting in which the presentation will be given. If the foreign affairs presenter is visiting a university in Italy to speak to the parents of students that will participate in a one-year exchange program, what does the presenter need to know about Italian culture? How should the information be delivered to parents during the presentation? What is the general atmosphere or mood of the parents? Are they concerned about the safety of their children while studying abroad? Are they excited that their children will travel to a foreign country? What do parents want to know about the exchange program?

The presenter needs to prepare a presentation which is useful and informative to parents and makes them feel comfortable with the exchange program. The delivery method should accommodate the fact that both the presenter and audience are using a foreign language, English, to communicate. So, would it be useful to have a visual slideshow with written words so the parents can see the main points? Or would it be better to just give a spoken presentation without a visual aid?

When speaking, the Chinese presenter may be familiar with using hand gestures from his native country, in which the hands are generally held very close to the body. In Italian culture, body language is important; the use of hand gestures when talking means that the speaker is passionate and interested in the conversation. During a conversation with another person, if the hands are held close to the body, an Italian might think that the other speaker/listener is not engaged in the conversation or is being impolite. So, what kind of delivery method should the Chinese presenter use? Should he research common Italian hand gestures and use a more heavy emphasis on body language? In order to prepare a presentation for an Italian audience, the Chinese presenter may need to spend additional time practicing non-verbal communications and making



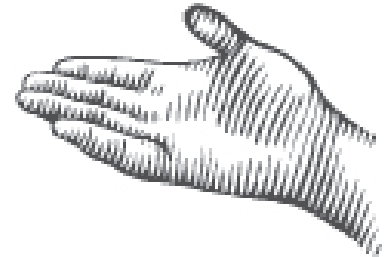
Careful observations of cultural body language and behaviors.

### Non-Verbal Communication; Body Language

Body Language plays an important role in communication around the world, from simple greetings to hand gestures for public speaking, and even personal composure. When dealing with other cultures, researching customs for body language can help to prevent embarrassing situations and impolite or offensive behaviors. Although there are some generally accepted behaviors and body language, each country has its own differences.



The handshake is a commonly accepted business greeting in most countries around the world. Although, some high context or traditional cultures, like that of Japan, may expect a foreign business partner to be aware of and observe the traditional social practices of the country in which he or she is visiting. So, when visiting another country, the general



rule of thumb is to be an observant learner: wait for the business associate of the home country to initiate the greeting, and politely return the greeting in the same manner it was received. For example, when greeting a Japanese business associate in Japan, the foreign associate may observe a traditional bow greeting. In that case, the foreign associate should return the greeting with a traditional bow instead of shaking hands.

Another universally accepted communication gesture is the open hand, used for pointing to people, places or objects. Pointing at an individual or even an object with the index finger can be construed as impolite behavior. Upon a first visit to China, an Australian woman proclaimed that “This experience has been downright awkward! Everywhere I go, there are young children shouting ‘lao wai’ and pointing at me with their index fingers!” After several more visits to China, the Australian woman became accustomed to the kids’ behavior and explained that “Seeing a foreign person is not very common in this small town, so children often get caught up in their excitement of seeing a foreigner for the first time”. Although children are not aware that the index-finger pointing gesture is impolite, adults must be more cautious as to avoid offending a business partner or even an international friend. The open hand pointing gesture is considered polite in most countries.

In cultural context, eye contact can greatly influence first impressions, since cultural eye contact behaviors can symbolize sincerity, trust and friendship, confidence, and respect for others. In high context cultures where business relationships develop slowly and where friendships are forged before business, such as China and Saudi Arabia, eye contact can be an important symbol of respect, although done quite differently in the two countries. In Saudi Arabia, maintaining strong eye contact can strengthen a friendship or business relationship because the ability to give direct eye contact shows mutual respect, sincerity, and trust. For Chinese business greetings, indirect eye contact (eyes lowered) shows respect for the other person, so direct or prolonged eye contact should be avoided. In Kenya, it is also a sign of respect to lower the eyes when greeting a person that is significantly older or a person that has a higher social status. In some low context cultures, like that of the United States, eye contact symbolizes confidence and trust. In these cultures, avoidance of eye contact may symbolize mistrust or weakness.

There are several public behaviors which may result in communicating offensive body language



messages, such as spitting in public, smoking in public, or acting upon one's own concept of the "floor".

In some societies, spitting in public is a common socially accepted action, in which the meaning is simply to clear one's throat. But, in contrast, spitting in public may be viewed as "I disrespect you", "disgusting" or "gross" in Australia, Canada, the U.S., and in some European countries. In general, the portions of these populations that have a low level of education (i.e. only a high school diploma or below) and are engaged in prison culture, may spit in public as a defensive action or to show discomfort or even to disrespect another person. Spitting in public may cause business partners from these societies to misinterpret a person as being downright disgusting, having a low level of education, being dangerous, or highly offensive. So, if attending a business meeting with partners from the countries, it would be best to go to the restroom to spit in private.

Smoking in public is an action which may enrage many U.S. and Canadian North Americans. Many cities have regulations against smoking in public to protect the health of individuals in public places. Research has found that the smoking of cigarettes may directly cause death, lung cancer, heart diastase, and other serious health problems. Therefore, if one person smokes in public, many individuals could be exposed to the smoke. So, in the U.S. and Canada, smoking is banned in restaurants, stores, libraries and schools, and other private and public establishments in which many individuals could be affected by one person's cigarette smoke.

So, if one comes from a culture where smoking in public is permitted, it would be safer to ask your business partners where smoking is permitted when visiting another culture or country. During meetings or negotiations, it is appropriate to ask for permission to smoke from the other people in the room. But, if one person refuses, then one should not smoke in the room. If one does smoke in the room, the business partner that refused permission may actually get up and walk out of the negotiations. The action may be taken offensively as a symbol of disregard for another person's health.

The concept of the "ground" or "floor" in both France and China have some similarities; people in both countries may brush off garlic peels onto the floor or throw sunflower seed shells or other food wastes on the ground outside. In China, the ground is viewed as unclean, so even in a classroom environment, food wrappers or pieces of paper may be brushed onto the floor to be swept up at a later time. Once, a foreign teacher invited Chinese college students to sit in a circle on the floor of the classroom to have a class discussion. But, although the room had been cleaned before the class session, the students politely refused, explaining that the ground is "dirty" and people should not sit on the floor in the classroom. In some Asian cultures, the bottom of the shoe is considered dirty, so it is also impolite to sit with one's ankle resting on the knee, as the bottom of the shoe would be visible to others.

In contrast, people in countries such as Australia, Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. view the floor as somewhat "clean" or in some cases, even as "touchable". In American classrooms, it is common to see kindergarten children sitting together on a carpet with their shoes on, after playing outside during recess time. Although there may be some dust on the bottoms of the shoes, there is really no other seriously "dirty" substance that comes in contact with the bottoms of shoes. This behavior follows the practice of throwing everything away in a garbage can or rubbish container, so the floor is kept clean constantly. Some children may even drop a piece of food on the floor, and then pick it up to consume the food, assuming that there are no visible attachments!

If one was to travel to a nation with the concept of the ground being clean, one should avoid spitting on the ground and avoid putting trash on the floor (both indoors and outdoors). Conversely, if one were to travel to a nation with the concept of the ground being dirty, one should be careful not to place any objects on the ground and avoid letting the hands touch anything that has made contact with the floor, such as the bottom of a shoe.



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## 1.4 Cultural Values Activity

### Popular Culture, Values and Customs

Popular “pop” culture may be considered superficial when compared to century-old cultural values and customs. A society’s real culture, which has evolved over hundreds or even thousands of years, is deeper than trivial pop culture knowledge. Many young people around the world confuse culture with pop culture, citing movies, music, or current events as a basis for cultural understanding. But, although these shallow perspectives may give insight to some cultural behaviors and customs, it would be naive to say that one can learn more than superficial and pop cultural knowledge about another culture by simply talking to someone else or watching movies from a different culture.

The first step towards understanding world cultures or one’s own culture is to ask the question: What is culture? The simplest definition of culture is a set of values and norms within a group or society and institutionally learned behaviors. Culture is also a basis for how people identify themselves within their own society or how people identify themselves in a foreign society. There are also individual components to culture, such as age, gender, class, and any other group identification or affiliation. These various cultural factors take time and consideration to understand. Before embarking on negotiations or a business meeting with a foreign company, it is beneficial to learn some basic cultural values and cultural practices to avoid confusion, conflict, impoliteness, or deeper misunderstandings.

Remember that the meaning of a value may be different for people in various countries. For example, the value of *family* has several unique implications in Japan, China, and America. If someone posed the question “What does it mean to be a good father?”, people from Japan, China, and America may traditionally define a “good father” in very different ways. What does it mean to be a father? You can look up the denotation (dictionary definition) of the word “father” in the dictionary, but the real meaning of the word, the connotation, depends on cultural context and social expectations. When you say “I love you” to your mother, your sister, or your girlfriend, the meaning of the word “love” is different in each context.

On one end of the spectrum is Japan. In Japan, a “good father” means that the father takes his responsibilities of providing money for his family very seriously, so that the child can have everything he or she needs to become successful in the future. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the United States. A “good father” means that the father takes his responsibilities of spending time with the children very seriously. If a father is wealthy, but never spends time with his children, society will look down upon him as a “bad” father. If a father is poor, but spends all of his free time with his children, then society will consider him to be a great father. Of course, in both Japan and the United States, both factors (money and time) are important for fathers, but in the two societies one factor weighs more heavily than the other. In China, money and time weigh somewhere in between those two societies’ connotations of what it means to be a “good father”. Values



are complex in terms of their cultural connotations; and within a single society, individuals will have their own personal interpretations of the values, making cultural generalizations even more intricate and complex.

Begin the process of developing cultural awareness by understanding your own cultural values and practices. Try to sort out your own personal values and compare them with those of your society/culture as a whole. Once a perspective on one's own culture has been developed for comparison, it will be easier to observe different behaviors and values in another culture.

### Activity

Break up into small discussion groups (4-6 people). In your class notebook, write down the responses to the questions and corresponding examples. Look at the list of cultural values (below) to see some examples of cultural values. Some of the values may be similar. For example, the values of *equality* and *fairness*, are closely related; the values of cooperation, teamwork, and solidarity may also be bundled together as a single value.

1. What are the top 20 most important cultural values in your country? For this question, please think about the cultural values that are important for *many people* or *most people*. This general perspective is a macro-sociological perspective. Discuss an example for each value and be prepared to share some of the examples with the class. If explained well, a single example may provide context for several values.

For example, if most people value *equality* and *individuality*, you may give an example that puts both of these values into cultural context:

*In Country X, most people value equality and individuality. These two values are highly conspicuous in regular everyday activities, such as when people go out to eat dinner together or have business dinner meetings together. At the restaurant, each person sitting at the table will be given their own menu, regardless of the person's age or job title. Each person will then individually tell the waiter or waitress what he or she would like to eat. Even children may select and order their own food dishes when eating at a restaurant.*

2. Are there any regional differences in cultural values in your country? Please take notes on regional differences in cultural values during the discussion.

3. From an individual perspective, what are your own top 20 values? What values do you think are the most important to you personally (from a micro individual perspective)? Discuss an example for each value and be prepared to share some of the examples with the class.

4. Pick another country in the world and research the most important 20 values (from a macro perspective). Discuss an example for each value and be prepared to share some of the examples with the class.

5. Find a country that has one of the same top 10 values as your country's top 10 values. Discuss the denotation (dictionary definition) of the word and then, explain the real meaning of the word, the connotation, which depends on cultural context and social expectations. Give examples to support your explanation.



List of Cultural Values:

- Achievement
- Adaptability
- Adventure
- Affluence
- Aggressiveness
- Alertness
- Altruism
- Ambition
- Amusement
- Appreciation
- Assertiveness
- Attractiveness
- Awareness
- Beauty
- Being the best
- Bravery
- Brilliance
- Calmness
- Camaraderie
- Capability
- Carefulness
- Challenge
- Charity
- Charm
- Cheerfulness
- Cleanliness
- Clear-mindedness
- Cleverness
- Comfort
- Commitment
- Compassion
- Composure
- Concentration
- Confidence
- Conformity
- Connection
- Consistency
- Contentment
- Cooperation
- Cordiality
- Correctness
- Courage
- Courtesy
- Craftiness
- Creativity
- Credibility
- Cunning
- Curiosity
- Daring
- Decisiveness
- Dependability
- Determination
- Dignity
- Diligence
- Directness
- Discipline
- Diversity
- Education
- Efficiency
- Empathy
- Encouragement
- Endurance
- Energy
- Enjoyment
- Entertainment
- Equality
- Expediency
- Experience
- Expertise
- Exploration
- Expressiveness
- Extravagance
- Extroversion
- Fairness
- Family
- Fearlessness
- Financial independence
- Fitness
- Flexibility
- Frankness
- Freedom
- Friendliness
- Frugality
- Fun
- Generosity
- Gratitude
- Happiness
- Harmony
- Health
- Helpfulness
- Honesty
- Honor
- Hopefulness
- Hospitality
- Humility
- Humor
- Hygiene
- Imagination
- Impartiality
- Independence
- Industry
- Ingenuity
- Inquisitiveness
- Insightfulness
- Inspiration
- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Intensity
- Introversion
- Intuition
- Intuitiveness
- Inventiveness
- Investment
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Liberty
- Longevity
- Loyalty
- Mastery
- Maturity



- Modesty
- Motivation
- Mysteriousness
- Neatness
- Obedience
- Open-mindedness
- Optimism
- Order
- Organization
- Originality
- Passion
- Peace
- Perceptiveness
- Perfection
- Perseverance
- Persistence
- Persuasiveness
- Philanthropy
- Pleasantness
- Popularity
- Power
- Practicality
- Preparedness
- Privacy
- Proactivity
- Professionalism
- Prosperity
- Punctuality
- Reason
- Recognition
- Recreation
- Refinement
- Relaxation
- Reliability
- Resilience
- Resolve
- Resourcefulness
- Respect
- Reverence
- Sacrifice
- Satisfaction
- Security
- Self-control
- Selflessness
- Self-reliance
- Sensitivity
- Service
- Sexuality
- Sharing
- Simplicity
- Sincerity
- Skillfulness
- Solidarity
- Solitude
- Spirituality
- Spontaneity
- Stability
- Strength
- Structure
- Success
- Support
- Sympathy
- Synergy
- Teamwork
- Thankfulness
- Thoroughness
- Thoughtfulness
- Tidiness
- Traditionalism
- Tranquility
- Trust
- Truth
- Understanding
- Uniqueness
- Unity
- Usefulness
- Utility
- Valor
- Variety
- Victory
- Virtue
- Watchfulness
- Wealth
- Willingness
- Winning
- Wisdom
- Wittiness



## 1.5 Cultural Greetings Activity

### Introduction

When people from various cultures get together for business meetings, political discussions, or educational exchanges, their cultural differences may not be very obvious at a first glance. But after some time, through negotiations, discussions, and other interactions, people from various cultures may begin to slowly understand their own culture in more depth and learn about cultural differences, including customs, values, context, and power distance. These various aspects of culture are not always obvious; in fact, it takes time to understand another culture in comparison with one's own culture. Many social behaviors are not easily understood until a person experiences social situations firsthand.

By using four very unique example cultures, let's try to understand the importance of multi-cultural understanding for international communication. Differences in cultural customs, greetings, and body language could be mistaken as offensive behavior or communication of bizarre meanings! Class teams are needed for this activity; four volunteer team members within each group will "act out" the greetings for their team.

### Select a Culture

Read the cultural descriptions aloud with the class. Then, sit in a circle with your team members. Together, carefully review each culture one more time. Each volunteer team member, please select an example culture:

#### Culture A:

People of a lower social status always look down at the floor when speaking with people of a higher social status, avoid direct eye contact. Only peers may give direct eye contact to one another.

Hand shakes are very soft, light and moderate. People speak quietly in public. Your people do not like touching other people, but it is respectful to stand very close to someone during a conversation. If a person backs away from you during a conversation, it means that you are standing too close; and it is respectful to give the other person a comfortable amount of space. So if someone backs away, you will not move closer to them.

Giving hugs is only for parents and their children — if another adult hugs you, it is very embarrassing and rude. When people are rude, the other person will save face (to prevent anyone from feeling embarrassed) by laughing loudly, shaking your head up and down, and smiling.

When people talk about the weather, it means that they don't like you or they don't want to talk with you. If someone talks about the weather, you should say nothing. The common spoken greeting in your culture is about local news:

"Hey, what news have you heard today?"

"Hi, I just learned that a new pizza restaurant will open tomorrow, and you?"

"That is great news! I heard about that, too!"

#### Culture B:

People from your planet use subtle body language to communicate, so your people are very aware of customs for eye contact in other cultures. Usually people from your planet do not give direct eye contact; people prefer to look at each other's hands instead.

People from your culture never touch anyone else, for touching is considered very sexual (this includes handshakes). Instead, hold up your hands on the top of your head like bunny ears; this is a polite and respectful greeting. If someone hugs you, this means they want to marry your daughter or son. Your people do not like to stand close to strangers, only family members may stand within 1 meter of each other. Strangers



should stand far away (at least 1 meter).

Your common spoken greeting is about traveling because many people only work 3 days per week on your planet. It is very rude to refuse an invitation to travel with someone. Always invite your friends to travel with you and agree to make plans later. So, it is common for people to ask:

“Where are you going tomorrow?” (Reply with your destination)

“I am going to Mars tomorrow, how about you?”

“Hey, thanks for asking, I am going to the moon. Next week, we should go to earth together”.

“Great idea, let’s make plans later.”

#### Culture C:

People from your planet give direct “eye” contact, but people prefer to look at each other’s noses instead of the eyes. The most common greeting in your culture is giving hugs. People hug one another for a greeting. When you talk to people, you stand very close to them to show that you are interested in the conversation. This close proximity means respect and honor in your culture. The weather on your planet changes very quickly, so the common spoken greeting is about the daily weather:

“Hey, how do you like the weather today?”

“I like it, it’s so sunny and clear” or “I don’t like it, it’s so overcast and dark”. “How do you like it?”

“I like it, too” or “You are right, the sky is too dark today”.

#### Culture D:

Your people believe in social equality. There are no social status levels in your culture, and everyone is treated the same. When you greet someone, you always give direct eye contact and give a bone-crushingly firm hand shake. People speak very loudly in public. If someone hugs you, it means that you are best friends or that you have made a deal! The weather on your planet changes very quickly, so the common spoken greeting is about the daily weather, very similar to the spoken greetings of culture C. If someone does not want to talk about the weather, it means that they do not like talking with you.

### **Class Activity**

Each team, please move your chairs into a circle. Follow these interaction instructions to act out the greetings for your team members. After each interaction, as a class, discuss the communication problems that occurred and discuss any compatible cross-cultural customs. Wait for cues from your course instructor to move on to the next step.

Step 1: Culture A greets culture D.

Step 2: Culture B greets culture C.

Step 3: Culture C greets culture D.

Step 4: Culture A greets culture C.

### **Discussion Prompts**

1. Which cultures share the most in common? Discuss two examples.
2. Which cultures would get along well for interplanetary business? Which cultures could develop successful business relationships the most easily?
3. Which customs of each culture were incompatible with another culture? Discuss at least two examples.
4. Were there any misconceptions during the multi-cultural interactions? For example, did someone from culture A think that the people from cultures C and D did not want to talk to him or her?



## 1.6 Letters; International Business Experiences

### Office Communication and the Flow of Information

Dear Colleague,

I have learned a great deal from my experiences while working abroad. Most notably are the differences between cultural values, high and low context cultures, and these factors' influences on business interactions and communication tactics. In low context cultures, language becomes very important because typically symbols have both social and individual meanings. Speaking what things mean, and what you say are very important in low context societies. For example, if you went on a luncheon in Australia, Germany, or the United States (low context business cultures), you might not know who the supervisor is by looking at the table because everyone has a menu, and everyone looks equal in the diner setting. Someone would have to introduce the employees to a guest. On the other hand, in China, you might understand who the supervisor is because he or she is the one with the menu, typically the supervisor eats first, and all the employees can not leave until the supervisor leaves. In high context societies, there are many rules to govern and guide behavior, so "spelling everything out" in high context cultures might be seen as a waste of time because it is expected to understand the rules and behaviors.

I remember a few years ago at a Chinese university, there were a few Australian and American teachers that did not understand the meeting process. The American and Australian teachers wanted to discuss details of the curriculum, business plans for the department, and new ideas. The Chinese teachers were already aware of the plans because they have already talked about the details of the department through informal circuits and "grapevines" in the office. The lunch meeting itself was not so much to discuss new ideas, but merely for review and to offer solidarity by eating a meal together. The Australian and American teachers felt like they were "out of the loop" and did not understand the purpose of the meeting. One teacher noted "I could not share my ideas during the meeting, it was very frustrating. The leader spoke and everyone listened. I had many ideas, but I did not get a chance to speak about them. Why am I even invited to these meetings?"

This particular teacher did not understand the purpose of the meetings. If a person wants to share their thoughts and ideas, he or she must know when, how, and to whom the ideas should be presented, and do it in an informal setting. Then the ideas will be passed along to other people in the office and confirmed during the meeting time. At the official meeting, the leader voiced the concerns of employees by paying attention to the development of their ideas during the week. To some degree, American and Australian business offices also have an informal and political network, but it is nothing in comparison to cultures that have a high contextual informal rule system.

Several years ago, during an international convention, an American business owner gave a speech on how to make regularly scheduled meetings more effective. After the speech, a French business entrepreneur approached another small business owner and stated: "Americans always state the obvious". The small business owner gave the French entrepreneur an awkward smile, and then explained to me and some of his employees that when he attends meetings in France there are more informal information exchanges before scheduled meetings. So, from the perspective of a French manager, American meetings may seem to give redundant information that employees should already know. But, since American employees often work highly independently of one another, informal information exchanges may not happen as often as in a



French workplace. So, from the perspective of an American manager, meetings may be a medium for the first exchange of information or to brainstorm ideas or listen to input from employees.

It is understandable that business associates from other cultures might misconstrue how other cultures make business dealings when they compare it to their own culture. To avoid ethnocentric tendencies, it is important to always understand how and why the culture interacts. Each culture conducts business differently from another.

Sincerely,

Marketing Consultant

### **Global English and the “WC”**

Dear Colleague,

I am a sales representative for a large medical company located in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. In my work, I travel to countries around the world such as the United States, Germany, France, Brazil, and Mexico. It seems like in every country, there is a different word for using the restroom. When I first started my job (about 10 years ago), I was in Sydney, Australia and I said “Can someone point the way to the restroom?”. Everyone in the room started to laugh out aloud, then someone shouted “we use the toilet in Australia! Just say direct me to the toilet!” Though it was a moment of shared laughter, it still puzzled me because my English teacher back in college told me that was an appropriate thing to say. A few weeks later, I was in San Francisco, United States, and I asked a group of three gentlemen “could you direct me to the toilet?” All three men looked down with embarrassment. They knew what I wanted and gave me directions. Later, I asked my friend why that moment was so awkward when I asked for directions to the toilet. He explained to me that when asking for the toilet, usually a person wants to do something specific to the toilet, like fix the plumbing. Others might think about what you are going to do at the toilet, so it may be considered impolite to make such a reference. He went on to say that “restroom” would be more appropriate in the United States.

As I traveled the world, I noticed that there are different words in English as well as the local language for a “restroom”. It is all about knowing what the words are and how to ask. In a business meeting once, I heard an excellent speech from a representative from a plastic company. After presenting, he said “please tell me where the crapper is”. Then I noticed a few administrators were not amused with his slang use for the “restroom”. His inappropriate use of this word probably cost him the sale.

The most common English word around the world for the “restroom” is WC. When I was in college, I had two separate teachers that laughed at the term WC. They said “that is not what people call it in English”. In fact, they were wrong (the teachers were only talking about their experiences in their own native countries, not global English). WC is what people call the “restroom” in English in most of the world. Whenever a dignitary, representative, or client visits in Ha’erbin, I always tell them to ask for the WC and everyone will understand and point directions. So I have realized that WC is global English for the “restroom”.

I hope this example helps illustrate the complexities of culture and language in business transactions around the world.

Best wishes,

Sales Manager

### **Cultural Stereotypes and Generalizations**

Dear Colleague,

I would love to share my experiences in global business with you! I have worked as a certified public accountant for a global banking firm for over 20 years and have traveled abroad for months at a time while



finishing projects in China, Japan, Malaysia, and India. If I had any advice to give to future international leaders it would be this: understand the general cultural dimensions of anywhere you are going, but be careful not to construct stereotypes based on cultural generalizations.

It does not matter if the stereotypes are positive or negative, more than likely they will interfere with your transactions. For example, when I went to India, most businesses have a higher power distance and a strict hierarchy with clients. This does not mean that you will wish with your dealings. I remember going to New Delhi once and expecting a strict hierarchy, but instead I found a very liberal free thinking company where all employees were free to speak out their ideas at any time. It is most important to know your clients personally while respecting their culture at the same time. Good business people know about culture, great business people know each individual they are dealing with while understanding the corporate business culture and social culture they are surrounded by.

Culture is a very complex subject that involves individual people, individual companies and businesses, social, external, and internal factors. Before I went to advise another company, I always researched all aspects of the business to alleviate any misunderstandings beforehand.

I hope this helps.

Best Wishes,

Certified Public Accountant

### Discussion Prompt

What are some obvious and not so obvious stereotypes you (or your friends) have about other cultures? Try to give examples for at least 3 different cultures. For example, some Americans have a positive stereotype about Chinese people living in the United States. Since many of the Chinese employees that have been invited to work abroad have special expert knowledge, such as engineering or chemistry, many people in those countries have a stereotype that “All Chinese students are excellent at mathematics and chemistry” because they have only had contact with engineering and chemistry professionals from China.

### Office Communication

Dear colleague,

For many years now, I have worked in a very culturally diverse company. A few years back, I worked with a newly promoted Chinese manager, named Mr. Zhou. He met informally with employees each morning to talk about projects, listen to employees give updates, and ask about data collection results. The whole team was always up to date on all of the research projects and no one was ever “left out of the loop”. Mr. Zhou maintained a continuous flow of information between himself and employees. A few months after his promotion, I saw another manager and the department director approach Mr. Zhou to ask why his team was not having regularly scheduled weekly meetings. The director was concerned that some team members would be “out of the information loop” without regular meetings. I remember laughing to myself as I heard the director’s assumptions, because from my perspective, Mr. Zhou’s informal daily communication strategy made our team have the best communication in the entire company!

After speaking with employees, the department director realized that Mr. Zhou’s team was quite efficient. In fact, other employees felt jealous that the team worked so well together and had strong solidarity. Employees on the teams with forced weekly meetings felt as if the meetings were unnecessary and said they would prefer informal daily communication instead of formal scheduled meetings. Mr. Zhou’s motivation and daily coordination made for good teamwork and good relationships between team members. The whole department eventually changed their philosophy on meetings.



It is always important to ask oneself: Is this meeting necessary? What is the purpose of the meeting? Could this information be passed along more effectively using a different method of communication? Take some time once in a while to evaluate office communication and teamwork. Try new strategies to find out which strategy works best for your office. Sometimes companies revolve around the same processes for years, so it is helpful to evaluate office communication now and again to see what room there is for improvement.

Sincerely,

Senior Website Developer