

AUTHORS

Dr. Mrs. M. Jeyarathnam  
Professor,  
Dept. of Management  
Studies, K.L.N. College  
of Engineering,  
Pottapalayam.

V. Mohanasundaram  
Lecturer,  
Management Studies,  
Training and Placement  
officer, P.S.R.  
Engineering College,  
Sevalpatti, Sivakasi.

# Cross Culture Communication For Managers

*A fit to all application for quick globally success.*

## ABSTRACT

Managers must become proficient cross-cultural communicators if they wish to succeed in today's global environment. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize multiple insights—from fields as diverse as anthropology, psychology, communication, linguistics, and organizational behavior—and apply them specifically to managerial communication. Culture consists of values, attitudes, behavior in a given group where most of the people spend most of the time. Managers can apply precisely the same kind of analysis to the culture of any given region, industry, organization, or work group. Communication is the life blood of an organization – and miscommunication has contributed to the equivalent of cardiovascular damage in an organization. Managerial communication is communication in a business context to achieve a desired result (writing a memo, interviewing an applicant, running a meeting, preparing a presentation). The managers, who want to succeed in today's global environment, should undergo cross cultural awareness training. Cross-cultural awareness training is a simple, cost effective and long-term solution for many companies. As part of a properly prepared international business strategy the provision of intercultural training to staff can reap excellent rewards. Equipping key staff such as managers and sales staff with the know how to deal with other cultures not only guarantees a high success rate when doing internationally but also immediately offers a company a competitive edge.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Managers must become proficient cross-cultural communicators if they wish to succeed in today's global environment. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize multiple insights—from fields as diverse as anthropology, psychology, communication, linguistics, and organizational behavior—and apply them specifically to managerial communication. Culture consists of the values, attitudes, and behavior in a given group where people spend most of the time. Three basic elements of culture are –

**a) Artifacts :** Artifacts are the things that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters in a new group with an unfamiliar culture. Artifacts includes

- products, services and even behaviour of
- group members.
- **b) Exposed values :** Exposed values are the reasons that we give for doing what we do.
- **c) Basic assumptions :** Culture prescribes “the right way to do things” at an organization through unspoken assumption.
- Managers can apply precisely the same kind of analysis to the culture of any given region, industry, organization, or work group. Managerial communication is communication in a business context to achieve a desired result. To be effective in any given culture, however, managers should consider the following seven issues before they begin to communicate.

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2. SETTING COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

As a general rule, managers should delineate consciously and specifically what it is they want their audience to do as a result of the communication—sign a contract, provide information, approve recommendations, or come up with a solution. If you are working in a different culture, you may have to reconsider your communication objective, asking yourself the following two questions:

Is my objective realistic in the given culture? A realistic goal in one culture may not be so in another. One way to get at what might be realistic is to analyze what psychologists call the “locus of control.” People in some culture tend to believe in “internal control” over destiny—that is, that people can control events themselves. People in other culture believe in “external control” over destiny—that is, events are predetermined and uncontrollable.

Is my time frame realistic in the given culture? What constitutes an appropriate time frame in one culture may not be achievable in another. It all depends on the concept of time. In some cultures, timetables are exact and precise; one can expect people to start meetings on time and meet deadlines. Examples of such cultures include Germany and Switzerland. Other cultures have more relative and relaxed attitudes toward time; one may be kept waiting; projects may move more slowly. Examples here are Latin and African countries.

A useful framework for adapting a communication objective in any given culture comes from the field of anthropology. To set an effective communication objective, one should analyze the culture.

3. CHOOSING A COMMUNICATION STYLE

Once you have established a communication objective, the next step is to consider the most effective communication style to accomplish it. Use different styles in different situations:

- \* Tell : to inform or explain, when you need to control the content and don't need audience involvement;
\* Sell : to persuade people to do something differently and need some audience involvement;
\* Consult : to interact with the people with whom you are communicating and whose input you need; and
\* Join : when you want to collaborate/ brainstorm with your audience, whose ideas form the message content.

Some styles, however, will be more effective in some cultures than in others. You may need to be more autocratic or more democratic than usual when you manage cross cultural barriers. Tell style may be more acceptable in autocratic cultures, in which power is unequally concentrated and the leader is seen as automatically right. Consult style may be more acceptable in democratic cultures, in which power is more dispersed and the leader has to earn respect.

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4. ASSESSING AND ENHANCING CREDIBILITY

Credibility will always have a tremendous

impact on one’s communication effectiveness. Five factors, based on a synthesis of the social power theories of French and Raven (1959) and Kotter (1979) influence one’s credibility:

**1) Rank or hierarchical power :**

Rank credibility is more important in high-power-distance countries, such as Philippines, Venezuela, and Mexico, and less important in low-power-distance countries, such as Israel and Denmark. One might “pull rank” differently in different cultures. One may also need to gain rank credibility by association in some cultures. For example, one might establish rank through family status in South America, village chiefs in Samolia, and schooling in France.

**2) Personal goodwill towards an audience :** Goodwill credibility is based on one’s personal relationship and personal “track record” with audience. In many cultures, business relationships are built entirely on this kind of social and personal trust. One must build these relationships before one gets down to business

**3) Expertise or knowledge :** Many cultures place a higher value on expertise than on personal trust.

**4) Image or attractiveness :** Image credibility is based on audience’s desire to look like the speaker (Attractiveness). That image varies tremendously across cultures

**5) Values and standards shared with audience :** Classic American business culture values such as improving next quarter’s bottom line, making more money, or meeting a challenge are not necessarily universally admired. Adopting values that are common with a foreign culture, such as the goodness of the society, organization, or department;

increased status or prestige; or appeals for excellence or moral correctness is a powerful way to build credibility.

**5. SELECTING AND MOTIVATING AUDIENCE**

The culture in which one is communicating often has a huge impact on how the speaker chooses and appeals to audience. Many management situations involve multiple audiences. Depending on cultural expectations about rank, authority, and group definition,. One needs to include additional or different primary audience members—those who receive 0 messages directly. Similarly one needs to add different secondary audience—those who hear about, need to approve, or are affected by message. Finally, one needs to reevaluate who represents the key decision maker in the audience. For example, are superiors usually addressed directly, or at least included, in all decisions? Are subordinates? Is it needed to add influential officials, leaders, power brokers, contacts, tribe or sect members, or family members?

Once it is decided whom to include in audience, consider what audience appeals or benefits will work best. Research on influence, persuasion, and motivation offers a wide variety of audience appeals, including material wealth and acquisition, task enhancement, career advancement, achievement and challenge, self-worth, security, satisfaction and fulfillment, personal relationships, group relationships, and altruism. It is imperative to motivate audience more effectively by analyzing cultural attitudes toward work itself.

**6. SETTING A MESSAGE STRATEGY**

Message strategy represents a fifth set of issues to consider for effective

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communication. Cultural norms will affect decisions about the message structure, channel, and format.

Some cultures prefer business messages to be structured fairly directly, getting right to the point and stating conclusions or the bottom line first. Such cultures value what they perceive as openness and honesty. In other cultures, however, business messages are typically indirect, building up to the point and stating conclusions or the bottom line last.

To make decisions regarding direct or indirect structure, international managers may find Low-context cultures (such as German, Swiss, Scandinavian, North American, and British) may favor direct structures. High-context cultures (such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Arabic) may favour indirect structures.

In high-context cultures, directness may be seen as abrupt, demanding, or intrusive. Worse still, inappropriate directness may cause people in these cultures to “lose face.” In authoritarian cultures, managers may need to use more direct structures than they are used to for “downward” communication to subordinates, and more indirect structures than they are used to for “upward” communication to superiors.

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In addition, standard business formats such as memos or reports may be different from those to which Americans

are accustomed; in Japan, memos are neither as prevalent nor as lengthy as in the United States. Similarly, presentation formats differ across cultures—including issues of presentation length, timing, and number of visual aids, flamboyance, and the nature of interaction with audience.

## 7. OVERCOMING LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Language difficulties represent one of the biggest barriers to cross-cultural communication. Even if English is spoken by everyone involved, dialects, accents, slang, jargon, and code words vary tremendously among different countries, regions, subcultures, industries, organizations, and professions. For instance, the word “billion” means a thousand million in the United States, and a million million in Britain. If one doesn’t know the language at all, he has two options:

- \* Use English, carefully and without unnecessary large words or jargon
- \* Use an excellent interpreter who is thoroughly briefed in advance, pausing after every short paragraph or thought.

## 8. USING EFFECTIVE NONVERBAL BEHAVIOURS

Although managers generally understand that language differences can cause major barriers to communication, they may not recognize that nonverbal barriers can cause even greater problems. Scholars, such as Knapp (1980), estimate that 65 to 90 per cent of what we communicate is, in fact, nonverbal keeping in mind three sets of challenges in cross-cultural nonverbal communication: 1. body language and vocal qualities, 2. space around you, and 3. greeting behaviours.

**1. Body language and Vocal qualities :**

Notions of appropriate posture, gestures, eye contact, facial expression, touch, pitch, and volume differ across cultures. As a simple but potentially disastrous example, nodding the head up and down in Bulgaria means “no” not “yes.”

Successful executives must avoid using any gestures considered rude or insulting. For instance, in Buddhist cultures, the head is considered sacred, so you must never touch anyone’s head; in Muslim cultures, the left hand is considered unclean, so never touch, pass, receive, or eat with the left hand. Pointing with the index finger is rude in countries like Sudan, Venezuela and Sri Lanka.

On the receiving end of nonverbal communication, prepare yourself to recognize gestures that have meaning only in the other culture. Chinese stick out their tongues to show surprise and scratch their ears and cheeks to show happiness.

**2. Space around you :** A second aspect of non-verbal communication has to do with norms regarding space. In general, Americans feel comfortable in the following zones of space: zero to 18 inches for intimacy only (comforting or greeting); 18 inches to four feet for personal space (conversing with friends); four to 12 feet for social space (conversing with strangers); and more than 12 feet for public space (standing in lobbies or reception areas).

**9. CONCLUSION**

Managers while communicating in a different country, region, industry, or organization should keep in mind the following points:

- \* Read about and discuss the culture before one goes. A single party

conversation on the topic will probably not be sufficient; the more one can learn about economics and industry, politics and government, religion and philosophy, history, symbols and traditions, social structures, cultural achievements, language, sports, and food, the more successful one is likely to be.

- \* Listen, react, and interpret the culture. All one can learn from studying in advance is never the same as what one can learn when immersed in the culture. Stay alert; be flexible; be willing to modify ideas. Use new associates as resources, most people are happy to explain their customs to interested foreigners.
- \* Imitate group members to learn by example, especially for nonverbal communication. Be particularly aware of how group leaders behave; follow their example.
- \* Perhaps most important, try to maintain an open attitude of patience, tolerance, objectivity, empathy, and respect to increase your understanding, cooperation, and effectiveness.

The managers, who want to succeed in today’s global environment, should undergo cross cultural awareness training. Cross-cultural awareness training is a simple, cost effective and long-term solution for many companies. As part of a properly prepared international business strategy, the provision of intercultural training to staff can reap excellent rewards. Equipping key staff such as managers and sales staff with the know how to deal with other cultures not only guarantees a higher success rate but also offers a company a competitive edge.

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Contact directly to :  
**Dr. Himanshu Agarwal**  
Managing Editor  
Mob.: 9412125893