



普通高等学校“十二五”规划教材

# 国际商务沟通

International Business Communication

孙晓春 安亚娜 主编



中国铁道出版社  
CHINA RAILWAY PUBLISHING HOUSE

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## 内 容 简 介

本书主要内容包括: Culture and Communication (文化及沟通)、Intercultural Theories (跨文化理论)、Oral Communication (口头沟通)、Non-verbal Communication (非口头沟通)、Written Communication (书面沟通)、Business Etiquette (商务礼节) 及 Social Customs (社会习俗)。重点介绍了跨文化商务沟通的基础理论, 跨文化商务口头沟通、非口头沟通及书面沟通的原则和技巧, 跨文化商务沟通礼节及不同文化的商务及社会习俗。

本书理论结合实际, 主要内容用英文撰写。适用于高校国际贸易、国际商务、国际金融、市场营销、工商管理、旅游管理、人力资源管理、工程管理等专业的国际商务沟通双语课程教学, 也适合作为大专院校经济与管理类相关专业方向的教材, 对于广大对外贸易和对外经济工作的业务人员, 以及在中外合资企业工作的管理及业务人员等都是一本很实用的参考书。

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随着越来越多的国内企业及其商务人员走出国门,以及越来越多的国外企业及其商务人员进入国内,商务文化环境越来越走向多元化,跨文化商务沟通成为必然。正确面对文化多元化带来的差异,克服企业内部管理和外部拓展过程中遇到的文化障碍,跨文化商务沟通能力成为每一个从事跨文化商务活动的商务人员的必备技能之一,因此,国际商务沟通课程(跨文化商务沟通课程)也成为高校商务人才培养中不可忽视的重要组成部分,对于培养和提高高校学生的跨文化沟通技能发挥着越来越重要的作用。

本书博取众家之长,深刻剖析文化内涵,展示中西方文化差异,解读国际商务沟通过程中的文化冲突,并总结行之有效的跨文化沟通原则与技能。全书共由7章组成:Chapter 1, Chapter 2 介绍了跨文化商务沟通的基本概念及基本理论,包括认识文化、理解并正确对待文化的差异、了解沟通的过程及跨文化管理的主流观点;Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5 介绍了跨文化沟通的基本沟通技能,包括口头沟通技能、非口头沟通技能及书面沟通技能;Chapter 6, Chapter 7 介绍了跨文化商务沟通礼仪及不同文化的商务及社会习俗。

在教学中可按照目录顺序安排一个学期的教学,也可以选择其中的主要章节结合实际进行专题学习和讨论。

本书由孙晓春、安亚娜任主编。其中孙晓春编写了 Chapter 1~Chapter 5,安亚娜编写了 Chapter 6, Chapter 7。

由于编者知识水平有限以及其他客观原因,书中疏漏之处在所难免,希望读者提出宝贵意见,以期不断改进。

编者

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# Chapter 1 Culture and Communication

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the chapter, you are supposed to understand culture metaphors, culture definition, culture values, cultural shock, communication process, and intercultural communication.

## Opening Case

David Green had been chairman of an American company, for only 30 minutes when he learned the company was suffering huge losses in Europe. The losses meant the company might not be able to pay U.S. employees their expected annual bonus. Since the bonus system was a key component of the company's success, with bonuses making up about half of the U.S. employees' annual salary, this was a much greater threat than simply a disappointing performance by the company.

The company, based in New York, had expanded hugely since 1990s, spending about \$325 million to acquire foreign companies. But according to David, lack of knowledge about either the cultures of the acquired companies or the cultures of the countries they operated in was a critical factor in the company's financial nosedive. For example, the bonus system was not an incentive to European workers, who were hostile to the idea of competing with co-workers for their annual pay. Instead they follow pay scales that are the result of contract negotiations by labor leaders who represent workers and reach agreements with management. The idea that individual workers might exceed or fall below the agreed amount of income depending on individual performance was unacceptable to European workers.

The company also learned that products not made in a European country would not easily be able to penetrate that country's market because of a cultural loyalty to domestically produced goods.

The third problem was that executives of the company recently acquired European companies only wanted to deal with top executives, not with lower-level people sent over from New York. This status issue arises from the cultural characteristic of hierarchy in German culture.

Another cultural issue is that workers in Germany, France, and other European countries typically have a month of vacation in the summer, so production gears down during this slow time.

The fifth problem was that nobody in the executive jobs had had international experience or had lived abroad—the chief financial officer (CFO) didn't even have a passport, and a last-minute panic occurred to get one for him before a trip he urgently needed to make to Europe. It finally became clear to David that he could not hope to bring the company back to profitability without moving to



Europe himself, where he could be at hand to deal with problems immediately while learning what he and the other executives needed to know about culture.

Questions:

- (1) What happened to this American company?
- (2) What are the reasons for the loss?
- (3) What lesson should the company learn from it?

The story is a cautionary tale of how the chairman and executives painfully learned the lessons of culture they needed to know to operate overseas.

Failure in business activities abroad can be fatal to a company, as the company's experience almost demonstrated. Mistakes can be unconscious as well as unintentional. A whole body of literature has appeared that documents cultural blunders in international business efforts. The list of errors is very long. Along with the errors are lists of do's and taboos for business people.

These are caveats against those potentially fatal faux pas—as if remembering not to cross your legs in Thailand and not to refuse a cup of coffee in Saudi Arabia is all you need to know in order to close a deal. But lists can't cover everything, and this proliferation of print does not tell you why you shouldn't cross your legs or say no to the coffee. And unless you understand the why, you will sooner or later trip up and fall on your face. The blunders-and-bleeps literature is full of instances in which the fall really was fatal and the deal came apart. It is always because someone didn't understand the why rather than the what of culture.

## I. Understanding Culture

Since culture is so important as we can see from the above case, then what is culture and how to understand it?

### 1. Culture Metaphors

(1) Culture iceberg (see Figure 1-1). Many scholars like to use iceberg to describe culture. Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the water, and a larger, invisible section below the water, culture also has some aspects that are observable and others that can not be directly observed. For example, a person's hair style may reflect a person's age. However, things like values can not be seen directly in life.

(2) Culture onion. Another metaphor which is often used for culture is that culture is like an onion: a system that can be peeled, layer by layer. Dutch management scholar Fons Trompenaars describes culture with three layers(see Figure 1-2):

① The outer layer: the explicit culture (explicit products), which is the observable reality of the language, food, buildings, houses, monuments, agriculture, shrines, markets, fashions and art, which are the symbols of a deeper level of culture.

- ② The middle layer: norms and values, reflected by the explicit culture.

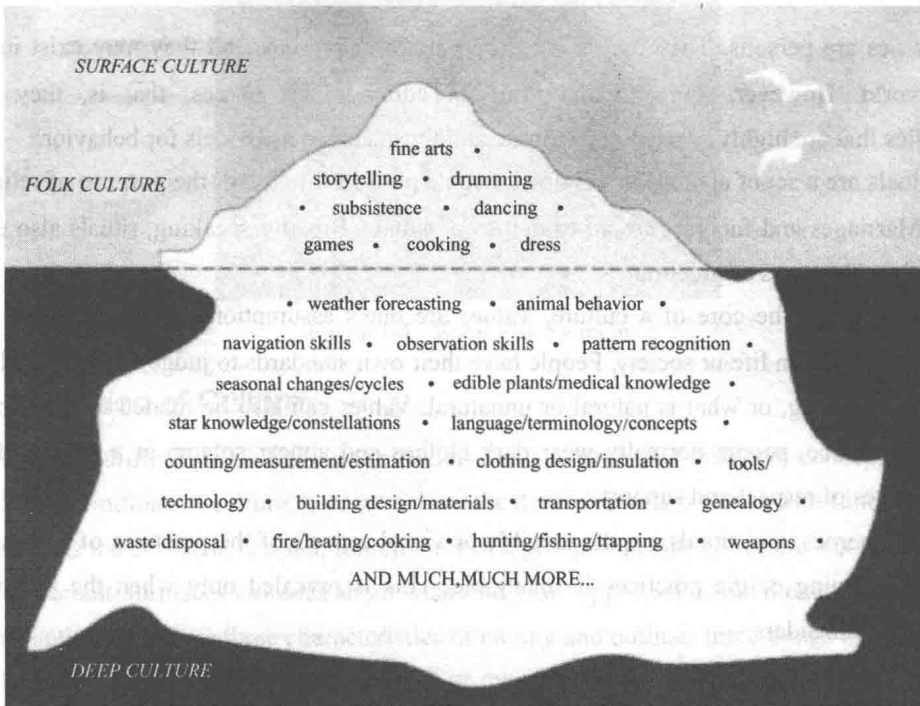


Figure 1-1 Culture Iceberg

③ The core: assumptions about existence—which disappear from our consciousness and become part of our system of absolute assumptions since they are the solutions to problems people encounter in the process of striving for survival. From the fundamental relationship with the nature, mankind takes the core meaning of life.

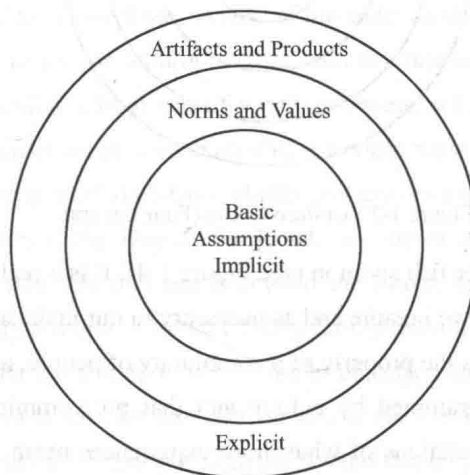


Figure 1-2 Culture Onion (Three Layers)

Other scholars divide culture into four layers of an onion as follows (see Figure 1-3):

- ① Symbols refer to words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning. This

layer also represents the feature of culture—being symbolic. For example, a red flag with five stars in China.

② Heroes are persons. They may live in the past or at present, and they may exist in real or fictitious world. However, there is one thing in common for heroes, that is, they possess characteristics that are highly praised in a culture, and thus deemed as models for behavior.

③ Rituals are a set of actions or activities. People perform rituals for the purpose of religions or traditions. Marriages and funerals are all examples of rituals. Broadly speaking, rituals also embrace daily activities, like ways of greeting.

④ Values make the core of a culture. Values are one's assumptions or judges about what is valuable or important in life or society. People have their own standards to judge what is good or evil, what is right or wrong, or what is natural or unnatural. Values can also be related to the norms of a culture. For instance, people normally wear dark clothes and appear solemn at a funeral, for they reflect the values of respect and support.

Symbols, heroes, and rituals are the tangible or visual aspects of the practices of a culture. The true cultural meaning of the practices is intangible. This is revealed only when the practices are interpreted by the insiders.

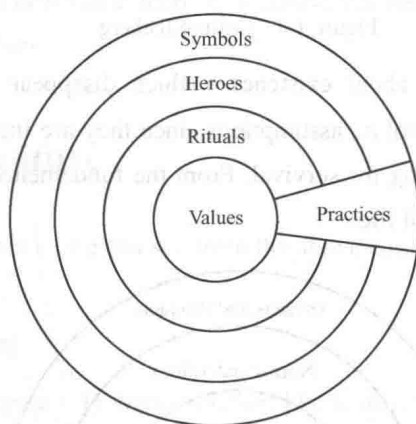


Figure 1-3 Culture Onion (Four Layers)

(3) Culture is like the water fish swim in (see Figure 1-4). It is a reality that is taken for granted, rarely examined. It is in the air we breathe and as necessary to our understanding of who we are as air is to our physical life. Culture is the property of a community of people, not simply a characteristic of individuals. Societies are programmed by culture and that programming comes from similar life experiences and similar interpretations of what those experiences mean. Culture tells us from early childhood what matters, what to prefer, what to avoid, and what to do. Culture also tells us what ought to be. It gives us assumptions about the ideal beyond what individuals may experience. It helps us in setting priorities.

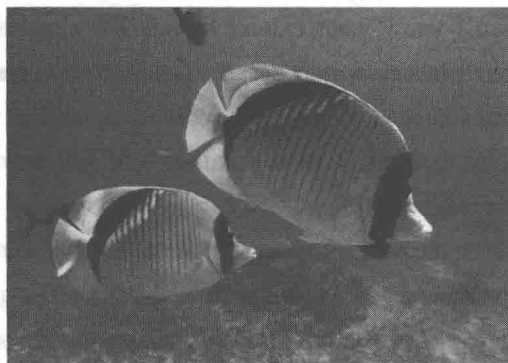


Figure 1-4 Water Fish Swim in

## 2. Definition of Culture

It is really difficult to define culture because it is a large and inclusive concept. From among hundreds of definitions of culture, here we follow the definition of Iris Varner and Linda Beamer's:

Culture is the coherent, learned, shared view of a group of people about life's concerns that ranks what is important, furnishes attitudes about what things are appropriate, and dictates behavior.

This definition covers three characteristics of culture and outlines three things that culture does.

(1) Culture is coherent. Each culture, past or present, is coherent and complete within itself—an entire view of the universe. The pioneer researcher into the study of cultures, Edward Tylor, said in 1871 that culture is the outward expression of a unifying and consistent vision brought by a particular community to its confrontation with such core issues as the origins of the cosmos, the harsh unpredictability of the natural environment, the nature of society and humankind's place in the order of things.

That different groups of human beings at different times in history could develop different visions is both a cause for wonder, and as we shall see, a cause of misunderstanding. The incredible richness of the variety of cultures fascinates historians, anthropologists, travelers, and nearly everybody.

Regardless of how peculiar a fragment of a culture seems, when it is placed within the whole tapestry of the culture, it makes sense. For example, if people went to Mexico in the last week of October, they might see images of skeletons, skulls and graves in every store window and every house. *El Día de Los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, is a fiesta with deep meaning for Mexican families. It emphasizes family ties that reach beyond the grave, as departed family members are remembered and consciously brought to join the living family members through a celebration. (In fact, the Chinese traditionally hold a celebration with a similar objective, called *Qing Ming*, on the fourth or fifth day of the fourth month) If the Chinese understood *why* the Mexicans display skulls and skeletons everywhere, they could respect the Mexicans' attitudes toward death symbols. But if all they have is the culture fragment—a bit of behavior—they will probably regard it as unnatural and odious.

The completeness of cultures also means members looking out from their own seamless view of the universe probably do not see anything lacking in their "unifying and consistent vision". Why do I need to know another culture? How can I see the possibility of something existing where I have

always seen nothing? How can I know what I don't know? The response to these questions first recognizes that culture determines business practices. You need to understand the cultural values you transmit when you interact with someone from another culture, as well as the other person's cultural values. You also need to recognize the likelihood that there will be gaps in comprehension—holes instead of connections—in your interaction.

If you know what people value and understand their attitudes, you won't unintentionally do something that offends and diminishes your chances for business success. An author speaking about the need for businesspeople to know about another's viewpoint says, "relatively few people understand that mastering appropriate behavior takes precedence over mastering the language."

(2) Culture is learned. Culture is not something we are born with, but rather it is learned. This is not to say people can talk objectively about their own culture. Much of what is learned about one's own culture is stored in mental categories that are recalled only when they are challenged by something different. We all have to be taught our culture. The process begins immediately after birth—even earlier, according to some.

If culture is learned, then it is also learnable. That means nobody has to remain for a lifetime locked inside only one culture. If you want to understand other cultures, you can learn them—not just learn about them, but actually get inside them and act according to what is expected in them. Many people have learned more than one culture and move comfortably within them. When circumstances dictate, they make the transition from one culture to another easily. Businesses don't have to accept failure in another culture simply because no representative of the organization grew up in that culture.

(3) Culture is the view of a group of people. A culture is shared by a society. Members of the society agree about the meanings of things and about the *why*. Along with everyone from whom they have learned their culture—older family members, teachers, spiritual leaders, peers, and representatives of legal, political, and educational institution—they have interpreted life experiences in ways that validate their own culture's views. Therefore, since they have little doubt about that validity, they all share the view that their interpretations are correct.

Members of a society probably agree without having to say so that something is necessary and important. Groups are motivated by common views, and these views are a dynamic force in enabling groups to achieve societal goals—protecting economic resources from unscrupulous outsiders.

For example, people in a given culture share symbols of that culture. The most obvious set of symbols is language. Cultures also share visual symbols. Company logos, icons, religious images, and national flags are examples of visual symbols.

A story is told of the Sultan of Brunei, one of the world's wealthiest men, who was shopping in a department store in Manhattan. When he made a purchase, he was asked for identification. However, he carried no identification. "I'm the Sultan of Brunei," he stated. The salesperson insisted he needed to show identification. A quick-thinking aide put his hand in his pocket immediately, and pulled out a bill in the currency of Brunei. All the money in Brunei has the Sultan's picture on it.

Now we'll look at what culture does.

(1) Culture ranks what is important. What is of paramount importance to one group may be virtually meaningless to another. For instance, consider the amassing of wealth. In one Pacific Island culture, the Gururumba of New Guinea, a rich man is required to expend all his carefully amassed fortune—in this case, pigs—in the lavish entertainment of the members of his society. To be able to entertain this way is the real meaning of wealth because it means the giver is owed and therefore has great prestige. But explain that to a businessperson in the United States or Italy who has spent his or her life amassing wealth! Usually in these cultures resources are to be husbanded and increased, not depleted in one big blow-out. To be sure, business people in these cultures often make generous charitable and philanthropic donations, but their cultures teach them to treat wealth with care and make it grow. Cultures rank what is important. In other words, cultures teach values or priorities.

(2) Culture furnishes attitudes. An attitude is learned, and it is a tendency to respond the same way to the same object or situation or idea. Attitudes are feelings about things, based on values. Attitudes can change, although change can be difficult. You can have an attitude toward eating raw fish, for example, that is positive and is based on the belief that expert preparation of *sushi* and *sashimi* by Japanese chefs results in culinary delicacies. Or you may have an attitude that is negative, based on the belief that raw fish can contain parasites that cause unpleasant consequences in the human digestive system. You can even hold both attitudes at the same time. If you do, then probably you value both fine eating experiences and physical health.

Attitudes are based on values. Belief systems or religions are powerful sources of values and attitudes in cultures. Attitudes vary according to how important something is reckoned to be (value). In Mexican culture, a death of an aunt is an event that business associates are expected to view as significant to the family members. A boss is expected to have an understanding attitude toward an employee who is not able to get a report done by a deadline because of the funeral and family needs. In Britain, the attitude toward a business associate's loss of an aunt is that this is a private affair, regrettable and perhaps very sad, but something that should not affect work to a great extent. In fact, for a businessperson, handling the situation well means keeping it from having an impact on work. Reports should come in on time if possible.

(3) Culture dictates how to behave. To continue the example of the previous discussion, a brief expression of sympathy by one businessperson to a bereaved work associate at their next meeting is appropriate British behavior. If the association is longstanding, perhaps a card is sent. In Mexico, on the other hand, much more than an expression of sympathy is appropriate behavior. Business associates may attend the funeral, send flowers, offer services such as transporting family members, and visit the family home to show respect.

Behavior comes directly from the attitudes about how significant something is—how it is valued. Values drive actions. Business is a composite of actions. So we're back at the point made earlier: Cultural priorities motivate business behavior.



In business, cultural differences usually make themselves known first by behavior, which is related to attitudes and which springs from priorities (values) in the culture.

Take the case of an overdue report in the following scenario. A Japanese employee in Tokyo whose report is not ready by the deadline goes to his superior and explains that problems at home with his wife have driven him to drinking more than he should and going home very late after the employees' evenings out. The result is a raging hangover that makes him unable to concentrate on writing the report. For the Japanese worker, neither the excessive drinking nor the domestic problem is a source of shame, and his expectation is that the superior's attitude will be acceptance and a paternalistic concern for the employee's plight. The superior's behavior is probably to counsel the employee and to inquire into the domestic situation in subsequent weeks.

When this scenario is presented to business people in the United States, they typically say that an employee who explained that he had failed to complete a report because of a hangover from excessive drinking (whether or not it was to escape domestic problems) would probably incur double condemnation, at least in the mind of the superior. He would be criticized for drinking too much and also for not completing the report on time. Generally speaking, in the United States the superior's behavior would be to tell the employee to get hold of himself and get some help or else expect the unpleasant consequences that follow from failure to perform one's work. The employee in the United States may be no less debilitated by a hangover than his Japanese counterpart, but he will offer some other reasons for not being able to get the report done: He may call in saying he's ill.

Behaviors by the employee and the superior in Japan and the United States are different; attitudes about the role of the superior are different; attitudes by the superiors toward the employees' situation are different. All these differences can be traced to the root difference: The cultural priority placed on submitting a report on time is different. In Japan, the passed deadline may not be as significant as the maintenance of the relationship between employee and superior, and that relationship is a kind of paternalism relationship. In the United States, an employee's performing work on schedule is significant as an indicator that the employee is responsible, shares the organization's goals for achievement, and puts the organization's goals for performance above personal matters. Of course, individuals and individual organizations will not all share these generalized characteristics, either in Japan or in the United States. But when this scenario is presented to Japanese and American groups, they respond with these generalizations.

## II. Responses to Other Cultures

When members of different cultures find themselves face to face, a number of responses are possible. History shows that a common response is to clash and to struggle for the dominance of one set of values over another. This is what happened in the early history of the United States.

Immigration has tremendously increased the population of the United States within the past 400 years, after initially reducing the native population dramatically. The United States, of course, is primarily a nation of immigrants from other cultures. The history of the past 400 years is the history of the values of certain cultures dominating the values of other cultures.

Priorities in the native cultures of the United States included (traditionally still include today) some things the European immigrants did not value, and vice versa. For example, immigrants wanted to own land; natives thought the idea absurd that humans, with their short life span and feeble strength, would try to own land.

Members of native cultures found significance in knowing their place in the scheme of things in the natural world, their relationship to other living creatures, and their ancient origins. Native Americans looked back over immeasurable time to the source of their existence in animal ancestors who were endowed with significant spiritual characteristics.

The European immigrants were trying to break with history and start something new and brave. The Europeans believed God and reason were on their side, and they had a post-Renaissance view that human beings were enabled by their will to accomplish whatever they wanted. They saw no animal origins behind the superb apex of creation they believed humankind to be. The Native Americans were assumed to be less than human, although some Europeans thought they were redeemable through education into the European view. Nevertheless, immigrants to the Western United States in the 19th century were rewarded in cash for the scalps of Native Americans.

Behavior of the two groups was also very different. The immigrants were loud when the natives were silent; they were aggressive when natives were passive.

The immigrants bought and sold slaves that were not considered quite human. The slave owners would have been astounded by the notion that the slaves possessed their own view—from their own cultural windows—of a whole and complete vision of the meaning of life. The slave owners had no appreciation for the complex, rich, old cultures that had flourished in West Africa for centuries. The slave owners thought they were offering the slaves an opportunity to become “civilized” by their exposure to European culture.

## 1. The Challenges of Diversity

Diversity is a fact, and it is not going to go away. Not all cultures in the world are going to become like yours. Most people in the world actually think others ought to try to imitate and adopt their culture. This is true, no matter who “we” and “they” are.

Somehow we need to learn, in Hall’s words, to “accept the fact that there are many roads to truth and no culture has a corner on the path or is better equipped than others to search for it”. We can start with Hofstede’s advice, “The principle of surviving in a multicultural world is that one does not need to think, feel and act in the same way in order to agree on practical issues and to cooperate.” We can agree to be different and to allow for diversity. We can celebrate our own culture in terms of how it is or is not like another, and celebrate other cultures because they are different or similar. The more we



know about other cultures the more we will know about our own. Then we can begin to explain why people from different cultures behave the way they do in business situations. Their behavior will differ, even if their workplace is in the same culture.

Often intercultural business communication is regarded as something necessary only for international business. But we want to emphasize that many cultures are represented within the borders of one nation: this is true of all countries that already have, or are rapidly developing, a high degree of technological expertise. In fact all large city centers, from Delhi to Detroit, from Caracas to Canton, are peopled by members of cultures from all over the world.

As materials, capital, expertise, and organizations migrate, so also the workforce of every major center in the world is increasingly made up of migrants. Markets, labor, and money are all global. Correspondingly, intercultural communication skills are extremely important for business people looking for markets, suppliers, partners, subsidiaries, or joint venture companies in foreign countries. Today's successful business people must be able to communicate interculturally both at home and abroad.

Business travelers are often characterized as unaware of—and unconcerned about—priorities in other cultures and the behaviors they generate. They are supposedly interested only in profits. They say, "It works at home, so it will work anywhere." or "I know how to sell/manufacture/manage anywhere." or "My product is the best, so I don't have to worry about the culture." But these characterizations may not be accurate. Most business people want to act appropriately and avoid offending their counterparts in foreign countries. Most business people want to know the buttons to push that motivate people in other cultures, if only for the sake of making a sale. But those who are genuinely concerned about how to learn what matters in another culture have few guides, beyond lists of "do's and taboos." As we have suggested, such lists are never complete.

The do's and taboos lists are usually accurate, but their helpfulness is limited. One sentence advice on behavior is like seeing a snapshot from a movie. It is accurate, but without the context of the movie's story line, character development, or even the specific episode, the snapshot's significance may not be understandable. Lists of do's and taboos can't explain *why* you should or should not behave in a particular way in a particular place. Lists can't possibly be comprehensive. And even if a business traveler were armed with a very long list, who can consult a list for every nuance in every different country? It's no wonder that business people may seem to discard tips on do's and taboos in favor of simply being themselves and acting the same way abroad that they would at home. And yet most business people know that business as usual—doing what they do at home—can be counterproductive when doing business abroad.

To be effective in a foreign business setting, you need to know certain things, but not necessarily everything, about that culture's priorities, its members' attitudes, and how they think people should behave. With the right set of questions, you can learn what you need to know about how people of another culture think. Then you can draw parallels from how people think to how they probably expect you to act. For example, if you know people in a particular culture have great respect for age