

商务沟通指南 (中英文对照)

(美) Sana Reynolds Deborah Valentine 著
张微 译

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Guide to Cross-Cultural Communication

跨文化沟通 指南



清华大学出版社

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Preface

HOW THIS BOOK CAN HELP YOU

As U.S. companies become global entities and as the American workplace and American workers become increasingly multicultural, we face complex challenges in cross-cultural communication. For example, foreign direct investments in the United States are approaching \$273 billion; because of these investments, millions of Americans now work for foreign employers. In addition, the United States has invested almost \$125 billion abroad, which means that many Americans now work with foreign clients. Our workplaces also are becoming more and more diverse: The most recent Census Bureau statistics show that the total U.S. population of almost 300 million people includes over 35 million Latinos, over 34 million African-Americans, more than 12 million Asian and Pacific Islanders, and over 18 million people from a variety of races and ethnic groups. These groups represent many cultures, each with distinct preferences in communication styles.

Unfortunately, our success rate working in this rich and demanding environment is not as high as it might be. Many instances of failure are caused not by inadequate management competencies or technical skills, but by lack of cultural sensitivity. Because the United States is geographically separate, Americans historically have been poor internationalists. We generally do not speak other languages (an indication that we don't take the international world seriously), and we often fail to recognize that people of other cultural backgrounds may have different goals, customs, thought patterns, management styles, and values. When we understand differences at all, we tend to

be judgmental. Our attitude often is “If they knew better, they would do it our way.” Even if we understand and attempt to work well with others in a multicultural context, we may suffer from tunnel vision based on experience acquired in purely American organizations.

It’s easy to find examples of this lack of ability to communicate cross culturally; miscommunication occurs every day in the American workplace:

- You think a contract deal is complete, yet it requires additional negotiation.
- “On-time delivery” seems to have no meaning for your vendor.
- An employee from a non-western culture is habitually late for meetings.
- A customer is offended by your direct approach to discussion of contract terms.
- Co-workers complain that a colleague “refuses” to offer ideas in meetings.

If you have been puzzled by the beliefs, behaviors, and work ethic of others; if you plan to work abroad in the future; or if you wish to become a more successful communicator in culturally diverse workplaces both at home and abroad—this book will help by providing essential information and practical examples for these important aspects of intercultural communication.

WHO CAN USE THIS BOOK

If you are interested in understanding and improving cross-cultural communication both inside and outside your organization, you will benefit from the information presented here. Many readers will find this book useful:

- Managers, executives, and other business professionals who must communicate more effectively in an increasingly multicultural workplace;
- MBA students who can count up to a third of their classmates as international, who wish to improve their communication effectiveness in both academic and business settings, and who want to gain an edge in entering a global workplace;
- Instructors in graduate communication courses who wish to incorporate knowledge of intercultural communication into their syllabus;
- Corporate HR staff who educate workers about intercultural communication.

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

We have taught thousands of business professionals and MBA students at corporations and universities in the United States and abroad, and have been both surprised and dismayed at the lack of awareness of effective cross-cultural communication. Even among people who have worked abroad, there is ignorance and misunderstanding.

For example, we have worked with managers who considered Chinese staff as uncommitted, disinterested, and unmotivated because they failed to make eye contact during performance evaluations. We have trained pharmaceutical representatives who misunderstood the unwillingness of Indian, Malaysian, and Hasidic doctors to shake hands. We have taught MBA students who were completely unaware of cultural issues, even after having worked overseas.

Other books on this subject, however, are too long or academic for the needs of busy professionals. That's why Prentice Hall is publishing the Prentice Hall Series in Advanced Business Communication—brief, practical, reader-friendly guides for people who communicate in professional contexts. (See the inside front cover for more information on the series.)

- *Brief:* The book summarizes key ideas only. Culling from thousands of pages of text and research, we have omitted bulky cases, footnotes, exercises, and discussion questions. Instead, we offer proverbs that capture cultural values and practical examples drawn from our business and academic experience.
- *Practical:* This book offers clear, straightforward tools you can use. It includes only information that you will find useful in a professional context.
- *Reader-friendly:* We have tried to provide an easy-to-skim format using a direct, matter-of-fact, nontheoretical tone.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

We begin with an introduction which defines culture, discusses the relationship between culture and communication, and explores the various ways culture affects values, attitudes, and behavior.

Part I: Understanding Cultures (Chapters I–IV)

The four chapters in Part I summarize the research on what differentiates cultures.

- I. Relationships: Individual or Collective?** Some cultures value the group and harmony over the individual and personal competitiveness, and stress relationships rather than actual transactions. Knowing about these differences can help you establish successful intercultural partnerships.
- II. Social Framework: High Context or Low Context?** Some cultures require explicit, content-rich, direct statements when communicating; others rely on an indirect, implicit, unspoken (but generally understood) and accepted context. Learn where particular cultures fall on the high context/low context continuum and how to tailor your communication to meet cultural needs.
- III. Time: Linear, Flexible, or Cyclical?** The view of time itself differs vastly among world cultures. In the U.S. business culture, time is defined as a linear and precious commodity to be used, not wasted; other cultures see time as circular, repetitive, fluid, and subordinate to people and relationships. In this chapter, you'll discover how to recognize these different attitudes toward time and communicate your organization's expectations as they relate to on-time delivery and other time-related issues.
- IV. Power: Hierarchical or Democratic?** Many world cultures view the organization of companies differently from the power-sharing, flat structures of most U.S. businesses. We'll examine ways to establish effective business presence when communicating across hierarchical and democratic power structures.

**Part II: Communicating Across Cultures
(Chapters V–VIII)**

Part II will help you apply what you've learned about cross-cultural differences by discussing how to write, speak, and negotiate in different cultures.

- V. Using Language:** Even when everyone in a meeting speaks English, misunderstandings occur because of semantics, connotations, idiomatic expressions, industry jargon, and untranslatable slang expressions. This chapter discusses how the major international cultural groups use language differently and how these differences can have a profound impact on your bottom line.
- VI. Writing:** Because miscommunication can be especially potent and long-lasting when written, we provide guidelines for developing sensitive cross-cultural writing skills. This chapter addresses the slippery issues of acceptable formats and tone.
- VII. Communicating Nonverbally:** The cultures of the world communicate by more than language. In fact, experts believe that 85 percent of all communication is nonverbal. In this chapter, you'll learn what constitutes effective eye contact, body language, personal space, and use of silence.
- VIII. Negotiating:** Cultures vary in their interpretation of business agreements and contracts. Some value specific and detailed written contracts; others prefer to conduct business through verbal agreements and view legal contracts with distrust. This chapter provides guidance on how negotiating techniques and legal concepts affect communication, and discusses ways to establish credibility.

The book ends with a conclusion, a cultural questionnaire to develop personal awareness, a bibliography listing the sources that shaped the academic and research backdrop for our discussions, and suggested readings and films for your continuing growth in effective cross-cultural communication.

Throughout the book, we use proverbs to illustrate major points. Proverbs reveal the wisdom and character of a people, or, as they say in Sweden, "A proverb says what a culture thinks." We also introduce each chapter with a set of proverbs that crystalizes the different cultural characteristics covered in that chapter.

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But most of all, we acknowledge each other. We are passionate about our subject and hope to share our enthusiasm and knowledge with our readers.

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Introduction

A closed mind is like a closed book, just a block of wood.

—CHINESE PROVERB

As the Chinese proverb suggests, the best tool for understanding culture, especially cross-cultural communication, is an open mind. In this guide, we define “communication” as sending or receiving information either verbally or nonverbally. When we add the phrase “cross cultural,” we refer to the communication that occurs between people who have different cultural backgrounds; such people may come from different countries or from the same country.

It’s a sad fact that many businesspeople interact with those from other countries or cultures without having a good understanding of the very meaning of culture.

An international banker with three years’ experience working in China was asked to discuss some of the cultural characteristics he had encountered. He answered, “Well, they [the Chinese] tended to be shorter than I am, and their skin was darker.” This bright, well-educated man had mistaken ethnicity for culture. Worse, even after receiving an explanation of culture, he discovered that he had observed very little of the Chinese culture in his three years working abroad.

As this example shows, the international banker could have benefited greatly from a short course in cultural awareness. The goal of this book is to serve as your short course in culture—a course that provides the foundation for cross-cultural communication.

Our first step toward understanding cross-cultural communication is to arrive at a clear definition of culture. We’ll also look at what experts have to say about culture and communication. Finally, we’ll review a seven-step strategic communication model that will be useful when you communicate across cultures.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

When we were children, many of us had the experience of being the new kid on the block. For the first few days, everyone wanted to meet us and play with us, but our good luck would wear off if we failed to pay attention. Those of us who were socially adept soon learned the “rules” of the new neighborhood. We sometimes found a champion—a kid who would teach us the sometimes invisible rules. We learned when to talk and when to keep quiet. We learned whom to talk to and whom to avoid—especially the neighborhood bully. We learned how games were played in the new neighborhood: Were marbles played “for keeps?” Were most games played in teams? Did the new group value winning or playing fair? We learned other social rules such as the proper way to address the mothers and fathers of our new friends. Sometimes we taught our new friends games from our former neighborhood. The new group would often modify the rules of the game to better fit their ideas and even adopt some of the “cool” sayings from our old neighborhood. We never realized that what we were learning and sharing was culture.

Experiencing culture on the job: Although we rarely think about it, we experience a similar learning curve in any new job. We show up knowing very little of the corporate culture. We know our job description, and may have read the website, but the politics of the place is another matter.

In this situation, a successful businessperson will align with someone who can reveal the corporate culture, help prevent blunders, and provide information on such questions as: How important are relationships in getting things done? Do teams or individuals handle most projects and clients? Would this organization be classified as on time or laid-back? How direct are the lines of communication upward and downward? Does this organization have a pyramid-shaped hierarchy, or a relatively flat structure? Is it easy to get messages to the top of the company, or is it important to send them through the proper corporate channels? Are memos preferred to face-to-face meetings? How formal and direct are the written documents? The process of uncovering corporate culture reveals much that is useful in the study of cross-cultural communication. All the questions that you might ask in a new job can help clarify the very definition of culture.

Defining culture: In this book, we differentiate between the popular definitions of culture and the definition that anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists use. The popular or common definition of culture involves music, theater, and art—the things that enrich our lives. However, these popular definitions do not recognize that music, theater, and art are actually derived from a more basic, yet invisible, structure of life. It is that structure that we will define and clarify, because businesspeople that are well-informed in cultural self-knowledge will be better able to understand and communicate in increasingly diverse workplaces. Our working definition of culture involves four elements.

- *Culture is acquired.* We learn culture from our parents and others in our community. As children, we learn not to step on the feet of others and how far from each other we should stand while speaking. We learn when to speak, when to listen, and where to direct our gaze when speaking or listening. Even as we are learning our native language, our mothers, fathers, and elders teach us proper modes of respect such as Aunt, Uncle, Mr., and Mrs. We also learn idiomatic expressions and slang. If we grew up in the United States, we were probably taught that it's important to be on time and that everything in life runs by the clock.

By the time we become adults, our culture has become invisible to us. We only notice that people have done something “wrong” when they stand too close or fail to use proper modes of address. We notice if someone is not on time, and we criticize those who have never learned the “right” way to address a person of authority. Some of us may criticize people who have grown up in a different culture by calling them “Yankee” or “redneck,” for example. All the while, we have no idea that what we are observing and perhaps criticizing involves the concept of culture.

- *Culture is shared.* Culture does not exist in a vacuum. In spite of the admiration for the rugged individual in the United States, one who is culturally different is quickly labeled eccentric. This leads to the next element in our definition of culture—that it is shared. Although we rarely take note, we expect people to think and behave in certain ways.

Consider that people raised in the United States favor a cause-and-effect reasoning. "If I do X, then Y will happen." We assume that everyone around the world reasons in the same way and that anyone using a different method of reasoning is illogical. In the same way, we may assume that someone who is habitually late to work and meetings is somehow deficient. We use labels such as "lazy" to describe a person who has a relaxed sense of time, even when that person's output is on par with everyone else.

- *Culture defines core values.* Because we have been taught our culture and share it with our cultural group, we tend to form the same core values. You may have worked on formulating a vision for a new business—a corporate mission statement. The mission statement includes values that the corporation holds dear, such as customer service, quality, or community service. In a similar way, groups of people form opinions about the things that are important to them.

A group sharing a similar culture might agree that family holds preeminent value. Other aspects of thinking and behavior will then flow from that core value of the family. Holding the core value of family might mean that colleagues have a benevolent attitude toward a co-worker who takes time off to attend the birthday celebration of a daughter or son. The same culture may also value respect for hierarchy and therefore design social and business structures to reflect that value. Instead of sharing power equally, employees would expect to have a clearly defined leader to guide their work and decision-making.

- *Cultures resist change.* Based on these elements of culture—that it is taught, shared, and forms our values—we can proceed to an interesting, although rarely discussed aspect of culture. Culture can and does change, but change is usually slow and gradual. We've heard talk about changes in corporate culture; for example, "This place is just not the same anymore. We used to really care about each other, but now we don't even know each others' names." If corporations are microcosms of the larger culture, then the fact that they can change is evidence that the larger culture can and does change. For example, the recent focus on a return to family values in the United States reflects the concern that the culture was changing in a direction that was troubling to many. Cultural changes tend to occur over many generations and only rarely reflect huge shifts in core values.

Developing cultural awareness: An ancient Afghan proverb states, "What you see in yourself is what you see in the world." This tendency to project our own beliefs onto others leads to problems in business. Without training in cultural awareness, we quickly label as "wrong" the behavior of those who do things differently. We fail to realize that individuals from other cultures who are so important to our future in business may be behaving appropriately based on the culture they were taught.

Just as we would favor the new kids on the block and teach them the rules of the game, we should also give adults from other cultures a chance. In doing so, not only will they learn about our way of doing things, but we will also learn from them. Cultural understanding will enrich our businesses and our lives.

As you begin to sort through your personal culture, you'll better understand how the characteristics we describe apply to your life. In addition to your own questions, we've devised a "Cultural Questionnaire" that corresponds to the chapters in the first part of this book. To maximize your growth in cultural awareness, we recommend that you answer the questions on this questionnaire (on pages 115–119) both before and after you read the intervening chapters.

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERTS

One path to effective intercultural communication is to review the work of scholars and researchers in the field. We'll take a brief look at the work of Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Mary Munter to see what they have to say about culture and communication.

Edward Hall: In a series of books (including *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, *Beyond Culture*, and *Understanding Cultural Differences*), anthropologist Edward Hall contributed a great deal to our understanding of culture. He defined culture as a form of communication, governed by hidden rules, that involves both speech and actions. He terms culture "a vast unexplored region of human behavior that exists outside the range of people's conscious awareness." Culture affects everything—especially the relative importance of tasks and relationships.

- *High and low context:* Hall invented the terms "high context" and "low context" to describe the communication patterns and preferences of a culture: high context cultures do not rely on explicit information because much of what is communicated is understood; low context cultures tend to be more explicit and literal. These concepts are particularly useful in business communication because, among other things, they help us to know when to communicate directly and when to be indirect. We'll discuss Hall's ideas in greater detail in Chapter II.
- *Time orientation:* Hall also coined the terms "monochronic" and "polychronic" time orientation. Monochronic time patterns involve a linear view of time as a commodity to be saved, spent, or squandered. Polychronic time patterns are more circular and relaxed and reflect a view of time flowing around us. Hall and his cadre of researchers recognized that time orientation helped to set a culture's patterns of communication. Chapter III delves into the mystery of the time orientation of cultures.

Geert Hofstede: Sociologist Geert Hofstede conducted an extensive study of employees who all worked for the same multinational corporation, but in 40 different countries. In *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede described four dimensions that provide an interesting way of analyzing and understanding cultures.

- *Individualism versus collectivism*: Hofstede observed that some cultures stress the individual while others stress the group. Ask yourself what you were taught and what you prefer. Is your ideal the rugged individual or the member of a team? To what extent do you feel obligated to take care of others in your group? Do you believe that you should make decisions based on what's in it for you or what's in it for the group? We examine these concepts of the individual and the collective in Chapter I.
- *Power distance*: "Power distance" is the degree to which the culture believes that institutional and organizational power should be distributed unequally. Were you taught not to question the actions of authority figures? Or were you instead taught that everyone is equal from the mailman to the professor with a Ph.D., and that any person should feel free to communicate with another person regardless of social rank? We will examine power issues more closely in Chapter IV.
- *Uncertainty avoidance*: Hofstede found that some cultures tend to dislike change and avoid uncertainty while other cultures welcome challenges to the status quo. To discover this dimension of your personal culture, ask yourself what you were taught and what you now believe about change and uncertainty. Do you see the unknown as stimulating? Do you welcome the new and different? Or do you strongly prefer that things stay the same? If you prefer that things stay the same, have you set up rules and structures that ensure that things will be done in a certain way?
- *Masculinity vs. femininity*: Yes, we know what you're thinking. Surely the idea of "tough" versus "tender" could be labeled in a way that doesn't link the culture to gender roles. We encourage you to overlook Hofstede's labels and think about the extent to which you value achievement and assertiveness over the nurturing of relationships. Do your beliefs mesh with the company that employs you? We'll discuss relational issues in subsequent chapters.

Mary Munter: Communication expert Mary Munter has constructed a model that helps businesspeople communicate effectively across cultures. In her book, *Guide to Managerial Communication*, Munter describes seven aspects in her strategic communication model. We explain these seven issues by providing a running example for implementing the model.

1. *Setting communication objectives:* What do you want your audience to do as a result of your communication? Based on your knowledge of the other culture, are your communication objectives possible? Is your timeframe realistic considering the culture's time orientation?

In early September, American small business owner Tom Rodriguez planned to import patio fireplaces from Chihuahua. The purpose of his call to the vendor was to collect information about the vendor and set a date to meet with him. Because Tom understood the Mexican culture, he knew that he needed to avoid calling on any of the important holidays scattered throughout the year (for example, November 2, Dia del Muerto or Day of the Dead). He also did not plan to call between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. local time because his counterpart would probably be at lunch, the most important meal of the day in many Latin American and Mediterranean countries.

Tom knew that his vendor would be more willing to meet if Tom's timeframe was flexible. He also knew that importing the fireplaces would probably not be possible for the current winter season. Therefore, he adjusted his communication objective. He would try to meet with the vendor in late September and then seek to import and sell the patio fireplaces for the winter season a year later.

2. *Choosing a communication style:* What is the most effective communication style given the context of the other culture? Consider Hofstede's dimensions of culture to understand the culture's attitude toward authority, individual or collective focus, and preference for direct or indirect communication.

Tom spoke fluent Spanish, so he knew that would help in communicating with the Mexican vendor. However, he also realized that his title would be important to the vendor and therefore introduced himself as Director of Operations for Decatur Patio & Gift, Inc. Tom also observed protocol in his communication by speaking off the subject during the first part of the meeting. He asked about the weather and Mexico's prospects in the World Cup. Because he was culturally sensitive, Tom was able to select an appropriate communication style and book the appointment.