Chapter 3
Communicating Across Cultures
Three Functions of Business Communication

- Inform
- Persuade
- Build Goodwill

Knowing how to communicate across cultures is essential for meeting all three goals, but is critical for building goodwill when doing international business.
The Importance of Intercultural Communication

Global Markets
Global Connectivity
Intercultural Workforce
Dimensions of Culture

Culture

- Context
- Individualism
- Formality
- Communication Style
- Time Orientation
Dimensions of Culture: Context

High-context cultures emphasize interpersonal relationships, nonverbal expression, physical setting, and social setting.

Low-context cultures tend to be logical, linear, and action-oriented. Value written word and directness.

North America, Germany, Scandinavia

Japan, China, Arab countries
Dimensions of Culture: Individualism

High-context cultures tend to prefer group values, duties, and decisions.

Japan, China, Arab countries

Low-context cultures tend to prefer individual initiative, self-assertion, and personal achievement.

North America, Germany, Scandinavia
Cultural Sayings:

- American saying:
  The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

- Chinese equivalent:
  The bird whose head sticks out gets shot.
Some cultures may prefer greater formality in dress, speech, and social interaction.

North Americans place less emphasis on tradition, ceremony, and social rules.
Dimensions of Culture: Communication Style

Words are used differently by people in different cultures.

North Americans value a direct, straightforward communication style.
Dimensions of Culture: Time Orientation

Time is seen as unlimited and never-ending in some cultures. Relaxed attitude toward time.

Time Orientation

Time is precious to North Americans. Correlates with productivity, efficiency, and money.
Miscellaneous Dimensions

- Hair
  - Because U.S. values youth, we color our hair.
  - In Japan, people with gray hair are taken more seriously.

- Clothing
  - Certain styles and colors are taken more seriously (think interview).
  - Clothing can denote status and occupation.

- Colors
  - In U.S., brides wear white.
  - In eastern countries, white is worn at funerals.

- Height
  - Tall people earn more.
  - People in power have offices on higher floors.

- Age
  - U.S. values youth.
  - Japanese youth defer to elderly.
Ethnocentrism

The belief in the superiority of one’s own race and culture.

Judge others by our own values.

Applying the norms of one’s culture, expecting that others will act the way we do.
Achieving Intercultural Proficiency

- Takes a conscious effort
- Leads to more satisfying relationships
- Makes work life more productive and gratifying
Improving Intercultural Communication

- Be careful with gestures.
  - Thumbs up
  - Hook ‘em horns
- Be aware of volume.
  - Loud=angry
  - Soft=innocence
- Stress changes meaning.
  - I will give you a raise.
  - I will give you a raise.

- Check your tone.
  - Shows confidence or uncertainty.
  - Shows sincerity or sarcasm.
- Watch your pitch.
  - Low=authoritative
  - High=annoying
Improving Intercultural Communication

- Learn simple phrases.
- Use simple English.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Watch the eyes.
- Ask questions and check for understanding.
- Listen discriminately.

Oral Messages

- Accept blame for misunderstandings.
- Don’t interrupt.
- Smile.
- Follow up in writing.
Improving Intercultural Communication

- Consider local formats.
- Observe titles and rank.
- Go for short.
- Avoid ambiguous expressions.

- Strive for clarity.
- Use correct grammar.
- Cite numbers carefully.
- Accommodate reader in organization, tone, and style.
Talking Turkey: Examples

- Idioms (expressions with nonliteral meanings): Our plans are up in the air.
- Slang (words with nonliteral meanings): stinks, cool
- Acronyms (form words using first letters): NASA, NASCAR (pronounced as one word)
- Sports references: You hit a homerun today.
- Abbreviations: (any shortened form): Mr.
- Jargon: discipline-specific terms (medicine, legalese, etc.): techies, facemail