



Communicating Across Cultures



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Communicating Across Cultures

Overview

- 1. Importance of cross-cultural competence
- 2. What is culture?
- 3. Cultural self-assessment
- 4. How do cultures vary?
- 5. How to deal with stereotypes
- 5. Basics of communication
- 6. Improving Intercultural Communication
- 7. A case study of German-American workgroups

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1. Culture has a strong impact on your communication behavior
 2. Different cultures have different modes, codes, and values defining how people communicate (verbal and non-verbal)
 3. When people from different cultures communicate with each other, difficulties and miscommunication can occur
 4. What can we do about this.....?

Intercultural Contact

- International: between people from different cultures and cultures
 - New technology and information systems
 - Changes in the world's population
 - Rapid movement towards a global economy
- Domestic interaction: with members of other co-cultures
 - Dominant culture, “mainstream culture,”
 - Co-cultures: share many features of dominant culture, but have also distinctly different patterns and perceptions (African-Americans, gays, the military...)

What is Culture?

Or:

“A relatively organized set of beliefs and expectations about how people should talk, think, and organize their lives.” (Bate)

“The way we do things around here”

What is Culture?

The Iceberg analogy:

Most of culture is invisible and taken for granted

Concrete expressions: dress code, architecture, food, language, transportation, political system, legal system
“Culture with a big C”: language, art, music

Artifacts: working hours, business meetings, social events, rituals, jargon etc. = structures and processes

Visible

Explicit beliefs and Values

Assumptions, expectations, opinions, norms, values, belief systems

Invisible

Underlying assumptions: unconscious, perceptions, thoughts, feelings

Cultural Self-Assessment



- Work in pairs: Discuss with your partner the following questions:
 - Name three cultural norms or values that were important in your upbringing.
 - How important is it to be punctual in the culture you come from?
 - Is it seen as impolite in your culture to interrupt others during conversation?

Dimensions of cultures: How do cultures vary?

- Hofstede's five value dimensions:
 - Power distance
 - the extent to which the less powerful person in society considers inequality in power as normal
 - Uncertainty avoidance
 - toleration of uncertainty and ambiguity or strict codes of behavior and absolute truth
 - Individualism/collectivism
 - self-orientation versus collective orientation
 - Masculinity/femininity
 - degree to which masculine or feminine traits are valued
 - Long-term/short-term orientation
 - favoring long-term or short-term planning

High Context/Low Context Dimension (Hall)

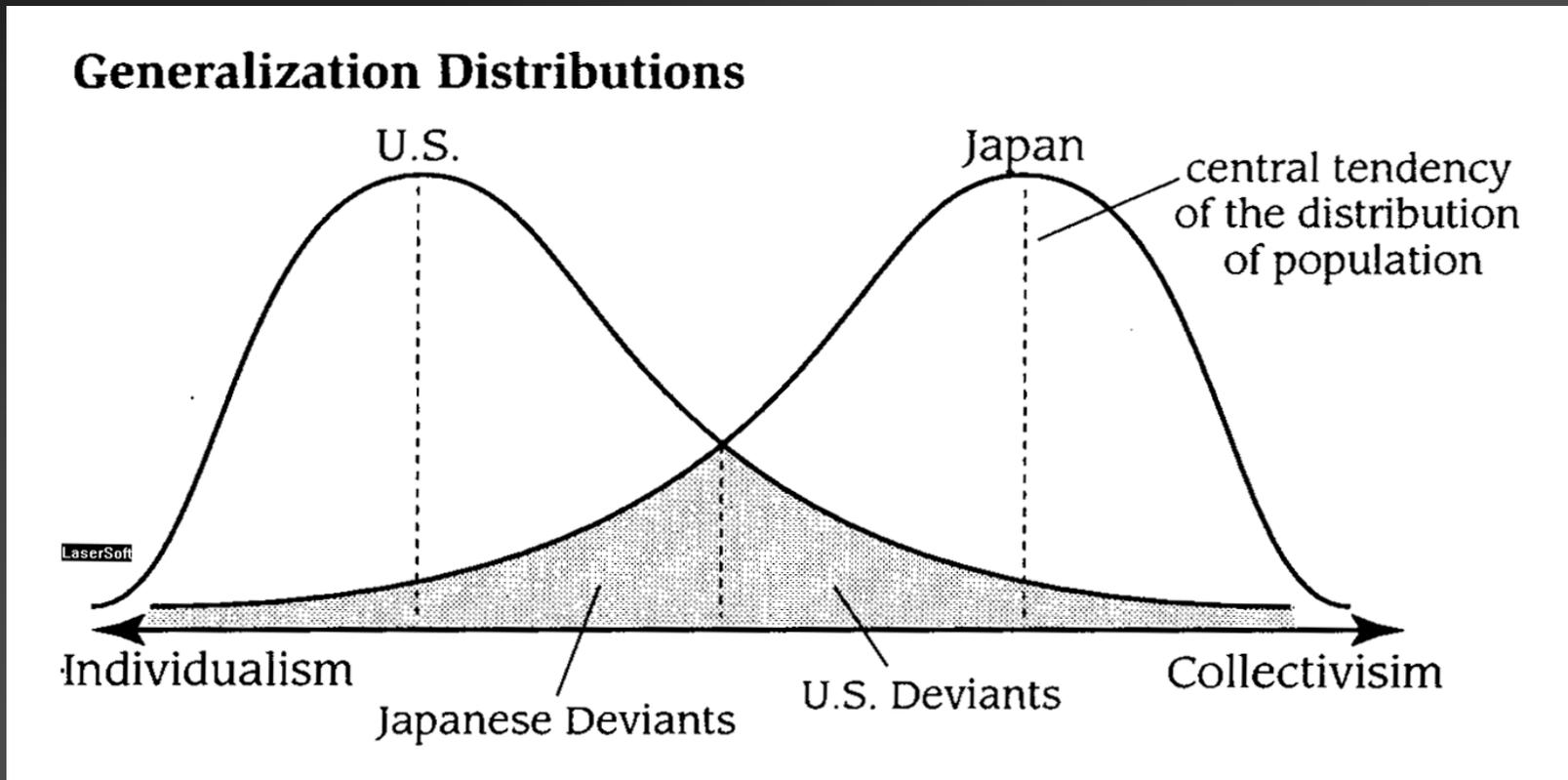
■ High Context Cultures:

- Many of the meanings being exchanged during encounter are not communicated through words (Latin America, Japan, Arab countries, China)

■ Low-Context Cultures:

- less homogeneous populations, verbal message contains most of the information, little in context of participants (Germany, Swiss, Scandinavia, North America)
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Stereotypes and necessary generalizations



From: Bennett, "Intercultural Communication."

Communication

- Every act of communication has always two levels
 - content level (you convey information)
 - relationship level (you establish a relationship)
- If the two don't go together, communication may not succeed

Non-Verbal Communication: Typology and Dimensions

Proxemics: the use of personal space (private space, public space, queuing)

Intimate (touching to 18 inches) , private situations, whisper

Personal (18 inches to 4 feet), couples in public, soft voice

Casual (4 to 12 feet), working together, full voice

Public (more than 12 feet), teaching in classroom, loud voice

Kinesics: gestures, body movements, posture, facial expressions, eye contact

Basic facial expressions that many people identify throughout different cultures: anger, disgust, happiness, fear, sadness, surprise, contempt

Wide cultural variety of gestures that create different meaning in different cultures

Non-Verbal Communication: Typology and Dimensions II

Chronemics: the study of our use of time

Cyclical or linear concepts of time

Relationship between Past, Present, Future

How late can you be? What kind of excuses?

“Mumbling something”

Slight apology

Mild insult that requires explanation

Rude behavior (not showing up without explanation)

Paralanguage

Vocal characterizers (laughter, sobs)

Vocal qualifiers (loud/soft, high/low pitch,

Vocal segregates (“uh”, “um” “uh-huh”)

Non-Verbal Communication: Typology and Dimensions III

The Use of Silence: from agreement to apathy, sadness, thoughtfulness, respect, hostility

Haptics: the use of touch in communication

Clothing and physical appearance

Improving intercultural communication

- Know yourself
 - Know your culture
 - Know your personal attitude, be aware of your stereotypes
 - Know your communication style
 - Dominant, dramatic, contentious, animated, impression-leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, friendly
 - Monitor yourself

Improving intercultural communication

- Learn a foreign language and go abroad!
- Consider the physical and human settings
 - Timing
 - Physical Setting
 - Customs
- Achieve clarity
 - State points clearly, explain jargon, be careful in your use of idioms, repeat key points, encourage to ask questions, check for understanding

Improving intercultural communication

- Develop empathy: imagine things from the point of view of others
- Try to listen, be aware that talking and listening has different values in different cultures
- Develop communication flexibility
- Learn to tolerate ambiguity

Some important points about cultures in Africa.....

- Communalism and importance of extended family
- Ethnicity and Diversity: allegiance to the kinfolk and ethnic group rather than to the state (Nigeria: one hundred million people, 270 linguistic groups)
- Friendship comes with obligations
- Colonial legacy
- Varied, but strong religiosity

(based on Richmond, Gestrin: *Into Africa. Intercultural Insights*)

Some important points about cultures in Africa.....

- Tradition of storytelling, proverbs, and lively debates
- Decisions are tried to be reached through consensus; don't try to be confrontational or push a point
- Africans speak with great eloquence, but their language is often imprecise and their numbers inexact, ambiguity as an art
- In Africa, time is not necessarily money...
-but money matters....

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