Pacific Rim Summer School
Cross-Cultural Communication

Eugene 2011
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Plan for today

• Dimensions of culture
• Culture and communication:
  – Communication context
  – Media, esp. electronic
Hofstede’s five dimensions of culture (differences in mental programming)

1. Power distance
2. Collectivism versus Individualism
3. Femininity versus Masculinity
4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long-term versus Short-term orientation
Power distance

Power distance measures how subordinates respond to power and authority.

• In high-power distance countries (Latin America, France, Spain, most Asian and African countries), subordinates tend to be afraid of their bosses, and bosses tend to be paternalistic and autocratic.

• In low-power distance countries (the US, Britain, most of the rest of Europe), subordinates are more likely to challenge bosses and bosses tend to use a consultative management style.
Collectivism vs. Individualism

Self-interest or collective interest?
Independence and autonomy or interdependence and social harmony?
Members of individualistic cultures are less successful in identifying the needs and interests of others and thus, in some situations, achieve lower joint gains
Collectivism versus Individualism

• In individualistic countries (France, Germany, South Africa, Canada, etc.), people are expected to look out for themselves. Solidarity is organic (all contribute to a common goal, but with little mutual pressure) rather than mechanical. Typical values are personal time, freedom, and challenge.

• In collectivist cultures (Japan, Mexico, Korea, Greece) individuals are bounded through strong personal and protective ties based on loyalty to the group during one’s lifetime and often beyond (mirrored on family ties). Values include training, physical condition, the use of skills.
Femininity versus Masculinity

Where feminine values are more important (Sweden; France, Israel, Denmark, Indonesia), people tend to value:

- a good working relationship with their supervisors;
- working with people who cooperate well with one another,
- living in an area desirable to themselves and to their families, and
- having the security that they will be able to work for their company as long as they want.
(Feminity vs. masculinity, contd.)

Where the masculine index is high (US, Japan, Mexico, Hong Kong, Italy, Great Britain), people tend to value:

- having a high opportunity for earnings,
- getting the recognition they deserve when doing a good job,
- having an opportunity for advancement to a higher-level job, and
- having challenging work to do to derive a sense of accomplishment.
Uncertainty Avoidance

• When uncertainty avoidance is strong, a culture tends to perceive unknown situations as threatening so that people tend to avoid them. Examples include South Korea, Japan, and Latin America.

• In countries where uncertainty avoidance is weak (the US; the Netherlands; Singapore; Hong Kong, Britain) people feel less threatened by unknown situations. Therefore, they tend to be more open to innovations, risk, etc.
Long-term versus Short-term

• A long term orientation is characterized by persistence and perseverance, a respect for a hierarchy of the status of relationships, thrift, and a sense of shame. Countries include China; Hong Kong; Taiwan, Japan and India

• A short-term orientation is marked by a sense of security and stability, a protection of one’s reputation, a respect for tradition, and a reciprocation of greetings; favors and gifts. Countries include: Britain, Canada, the Philippines; Germany, Australia
Culture and Communication

Individualism-collectivism,
Egalitarianism-hierarchy, and
Communication context (low-high)

These dimensions frame and guide interpretations -- not only how information is exchanged but what communicators believe is relevant or influential in a situation.
Thinking: analytical vs. intuitive

Analytical-rational thinking to focus on tasks or intuitive-experiential thinking and appeals to emotion, personal stories, metaphorical language etc. to focus on maintaining the relationship
Egalitarianism-Hierarchy

In a hierarchical cultures, social status determines power and those with lower status are expected to defer to those with higher status.

In egalitarian cultures, influence may be more linked to the skill or availability of alternatives regardless of social status. Influence among participants is also more balanced.

Power moves in hierarchical cultures may be seen as normal and acceptable but may lead to open confrontation and conflict spirals in egalitarian cultures.
Communication Context

(cf. "context-free" vs. "context-sensitive" languages)

Context refers to the degree in which messages acquire additional meaning from the settings in which they arise.

Explicit messages or implicit messages? In explicit (low context) cultures, participants share information about interests and preferences openly through a series of direct questions and answers.

In implicit (high context) cultures, participants use trial and error without much direct verbal exchanges about their interests and preferences. These must be interpreted from the slight amendments made during the exchange of proposals or through other readings of the context.
Electronic Media

Media influences what information is shared, how it is communicated, what is attended to and interpreted.

Some information is easy to communicate face-to-face but difficult to communicate by email. Status cues, for example, are harder to communicate. As a result, people pay more attention to the content of an email because contextual clues are often absent in the message itself.

Media richness and interactivity affect the intensity and manner in which culturally based communication takes place.