Pacific Rim Summer School
Cross-Cultural Communication

Eugene 2011
August 17
Plan for today

- Communication Media, esp. electronic
- (Debriefing the Ethics Symposium)
  - Legal view of patent laws
    - Suits and appeals, data over last decade
  - Ethical hinders to innovation
    - Publications and patents
  - Culture-specific IPR attitudes
    - “Arts and Sciences” vs. knock-offs
Electronic Communication 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 (“rich “vs. “lean”) and interactivity affect the intensity and manner in which culturally based communication takes place.
Power distance in email

("Hong Kong Chinese negotiators who negotiated via email achieved higher gains compared to members of this culture who negotiated face-to-face.")

Email reduces the reliance on power schemas based on social status. This greatly affect the way communication occurs in cultures with high power distance based on social status, but will have less effect on changing the way persons in more egalitarian cultures negotiate.
Lean media may promote distributive strategies and lower joint gains, due to the more direct and sometimes confrontational approaches and the high probability of misinterpretations. This may make it more difficult for more egalitarian cultures to achieve joint gains if they go too far with their direct, confrontational, self interests.
Self-Interest and email

("Japanese negotiators achieve lower gains when negotiating with cultural outsiders face-to-face than they do negotiating with other Japanese."")

In email, self-interested individualists may go too far, reducing the chance of reaching agreement -- failing to get enough information about the other and, therefore, failing to achieve mutual gain. Individualists also already experience difficulty understanding the interests of others, and email makes this process even more difficult.
The emphasis on self-interest in email may actually benefit collectivists. The risk in negotiating with a self-interested party is that an agreement may be reached before information about integrative issues arises.

With a heightened focus on self-interest (and lower relationship focus and obligations, face-saving gestures, etc.) collectivists might “push harder before coming to agreement, thus enhancing joint outcomes.”
Cross-cultural Conflict Resolution in Teams

The impact of culture on the prevention and resolution of conflict in teams.

One reason that teams fail to meet performance expectations is their paralysis through unresolved conflict. Therefore, it is important to talk about conflict prevention and resolution issues up front. It will go a long way to the enhanced productivity that is expected from a team that is performing well.
Teams Dynamics

Team development phases:
- 'forming'
- 'storming'
- 'norming'
- 'performing'
- (and, often 'adjourning')

A successful (North American) team will:
- be comfortable dealing with conflict
- be committed to resolving disputes close to the source
- solve disputes based on interests (over rights and power)
- learn from experience with conflicts.
Comfort with Conflict

Collectivists, who place a high value on harmony, getting along and 'face' see conflict as a sign of social failure. As a result, comfort levels with conflict situations, especially of an interpersonal nature are low. Conflict is often avoided.

While many individualists also feel discomfort with conflict, it is acknowledged as an inevitable part of life that must be dealt with. However, being in conflict with another is not necessarily something to be ashamed about.
Involvement of Third Parties

Team members from a collectivist culture will probably be more comfortable with a fellow team member addressing a conflict, rather than bringing in someone from the outside.

Individualists, on the other hand, may prefer an impartial outsider, whose relationship to the team is remote, eg. external mediator.

- In western, individualistic cultures mediation has evolved as a process in which the third party does not make decisions for the disputants.
- In collectivist cultures, mediators are often expected to provide counsel, evaluate and advise in an effort to restore harmony.
Communication Styles

Expressive or restrained? Some team members may have been socialized to reveal strong emotions and to feel comfortable with prolonged eye contact and touch. Others may be more stoic, and mask emotions with a poker face, use monotone speech and avoid eye contact. Problems arise when value judgments are made on the basis of the different styles.

Directness: Some cultures are very direct. They like to 'cut to the chase' and get frustrated with someone who 'beats around the bush'. Indirect cultures prefer to deal with relational aspects first, and to restore harmony before addressing substantive issues.
Negotiation Style

During negotiations, cultures that prefer a direct communication style will seek direct, face to face communication rather than indirect shuttle diplomacy.

There are other cultural factors that have a bearing on the way a team will approach conflict prevention and resolution:

- our relationship to time
- our relationship to rules
- our relationship to venue
Lessons

1. **Know Yourself and Your Own Culture**: Being aware of our own cultures helps us to be open to different ideas. We are able to compare and contrast different approaches without being threatened.

2. **Learn Others’ Expectations**: "expect different expectations."

3. **Check Your Assumptions**: Develop acceptable communication protocols to check out the basis of our perceptions.
   - One approach is to give specific feedback on the behavior you observed
   - Another variation is to give feedback on how you felt when the specified behavior occurred.
Lessons (contd.)

4. **Ask Questions**: Rather than assuming you know, you ask to clarify why things are being done differently. Open ended questions are generally less threatening, but close ended questions will often eliminate confusion on a particular aspect of culture.

5. **Listen**: Not all cultures are comfortable expressing feelings in public. A compromise over cultural norms is better than imposition of values by a dominant group.

6. "The Platinum Rule": Treat team members as they would like to be treated rather than the way we like to be treated. It is similar to the difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy is not about "walking a mile in his moccasins" but imagining "how he feels walking in his moccasins."
HBR: Four types of conflict in multi-cultural teams

• Direct versus indirect communication.
Some team members use direct, explicit communication while others are indirect, for example, asking questions instead of pointing out problems with a project. When members see such differences as violations of their culture’s communication norms, relationships can suffer.
Trouble with accents and fluency. Members who aren't fluent in the team's dominant language may have difficulty communicating their knowledge. This can prevent the team from using their expertise and create frustration or perceptions of incompetence.

Differing attitudes toward hierarchy. Team members from hierarchical cultures expect to be treated differently according to their status in the organization. Members from egalitarian cultures do not. Failure of some members to honor those expectations can cause humiliation or loss of stature and credibility.

Conflicting decision-making norms. Members vary in how quickly they make decisions and in how much analysis they require beforehand. Someone who prefers making decisions quickly may grow frustrated with those who need more time.
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FOUR INTERVENTIONS

Your team’s unique circumstances can help you determine how to respond to multicultural conflicts. Consider these options:

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<td>Structural intervention: reorganizing to reduce friction</td>
<td>The team has obvious subgroups, or members cling to negative stereotypes of one another.</td>
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<td>Exit: voluntary or involuntary removal of a team member</td>
<td>Emotions are running high, and too much face has been lost on both sides to salvage the situation.</td>
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• **FOUR BARRIERS**
• The following cultural differences can cause
• destructive conflicts in a team:
• • Direct versus indirect communication.
• Some team members use direct, explicit communication while others are indirect, for example, asking questions instead of pointing out problems with a project.
• When members see such differences as violations of their culture's communication norms, relationships can suffer.
• • Trouble with accents and fluency.
• Members who aren't fluent in the team's dominant language may have difficulty communicating their knowledge. This can prevent the team from using their expertise and create frustration or perceptions of incompetence.
• • Differing attitudes toward hierarchy.
• Team members from hierarchical cultures expect to be treated differently according to their status in the organization. Members from egalitarian cultures do not. Failure of some members to honor those expectations can cause humiliation or loss of stature and credibility.
• • Conflicting decision-making norms.
• Members vary in how quickly they make decisions and in how much analysis they require beforehand. Someone who prefers making decisions quickly may grow frustrated with those who need more time.
• **FOUR INTERVENTIONS**
• Your team's unique circumstances can help you determine how to respond to multicultural conflicts. Consider these options:
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• Example
• Adaptation: working with or around differences
• Members are willing to acknowledge cultural differences and figure out how to live with them.
• An American engineer working on a team that included Israelis was shocked by their in-your-face, argumentative style. Once he noticed they confronted each other and still worked together—he realized confrontations weren't personal attacks and accepted their style.
• Structural intervention: reorganizing to reduce friction
• The team has obvious subgroups, or members cling to negative stereotypes of one another.
• An international research team's leader realized that when he led meetings, members "shut down" because they felt intimidated by his executive status. After he hired a consultant to run future meetings, members participated more.
• Managerial intervention: making final decisions without team involvement
• Rarely; for instance, a new team needs guidance in establishing productive norms.
• A software development team's lingua franca was English, but some members spoke with pronounced accents. The manager explained they'd been chosen for their task expertise, not fluency in English. And she directed them to tell customers: "I realize I have an accent. If you don't understand what I'm saying, just stop me and ask questions."
• Exit: voluntary or involuntary removal of a team member
• Emotions are running high, and too much face has been lost on both sides to salvage the situation.
• When two members of a multicultural consulting team couldn't resolve their disagreement over how to approach problems, one member left the firm.
Group Exercises

1. Manager asks the team to come up with one member to give an achievement award. Describe the process whereby you will select the member.

2. One of the team members is leaking information to a rival company. What do the other team members do?

3. Boss’s incompetent nephew is put on your team. What do you do?

4. The manager has asked out your female colleague who is unwilling. The colleague requests your help. What do you do?
Attributions

- Robert Paterson
- Barsness and Bhappu
- Nipporica.com
- John Ford