

# THE NONVERBAL DIMENSION IN CROSS- CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS

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*As the global economy becomes more entrenched and the importance of internationalization becomes evident to American businesses, the number of contacts with foreign agents will escalate. Regardless of the type of exchange (from wheat to software), the end result is often cross-cultural negotiations. This paper examines the dimension of nonverbal communications in cross-cultural communications and provides recommendations for increasing the likelihood of success in a cross-cultural negotiation.*

**T**he impact of international business on American companies has been considerably understated (Adler & Graham, 1989; Adler, Gehrke & Graham, 1987; Fayerweather & Kapoor, 1976; Foster, 1992). For example, in 1995 two-way trade in goods and services amounted to well over 1.6 trillion dollars (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1996a), or nearly 25 percent of the U.S. GDP (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1996b). No part of the economy can avoid the international dimension. Over 70 percent of American firms are actively competing against foreign-based firms. If an American firm is not competing against a foreign firm, it is

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probably either being supplied by or selling to foreign-based firms. Foreign direct investment in the U.S. has reached over \$400 billion and continues to increase year by year. In the nineties, only firms that have failed or that are on the brink of failure will be exempt from dealing with foreign organizations.

Agreements between firms are at the forefront of international business opportunities. Agreements are the most important documents requiring negotiations between a U.S. firm and a foreign organization (Anand, 1986; Casse & Deal, 1985). As implementation of agreements becomes more difficult and complex, cross-cultural negotiations will become increasingly important to the global organization (Foster, 1992; Frank, 1992; Gulbro & Herbig, 1996).

All exchanges include some elements of negotiation. Also, every negotiation presents opportunities and dangers for all parties. Thus, while poor negotiations can quickly undo careful prior planning, international negotiations are fast becoming unavoidable for a growing number of U.S. based firms. And negotiation-related problems are often magnified when they cross national cultures (Foster, 1992; Herbig & Kramer, 1991; Herbig & Kramer, 1992a; Herbig & Kramer, 1992b).

### CROSS-CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS

When two people communicate, they rarely talk about precisely the same subject, since meaning is based on an individual's perceptions and cultural conditioning. When negotiating internationally, the "[p]otential for misunderstanding will be greater; more time will be lost in talking past each other" (Fisher, 1980). Frequently, intercultural communication translates into anticipating culturally related ideas most likely to be understood by a person of a given culture, and "[d]iscussions are often impeded because the two sides seem to be pursuing different paths of logic" (Fisher, 1980).

When one takes the comparatively simple negotiation process into a cross-cultural context, it becomes much more complex in a number of ways. It is naive to venture into international negotiation with the belief that "after all people are pretty much alike everywhere and behave much as we do." Even when a person wears the same clothes you do, speaks English as well as (or even better than) you, and prefers many of the comforts and attributes of American life (food, hotels, sports), it would be foolish to view a member of another culture as a kindred spirit (Adler & Graham, 1989; Elishberg, Gauvin, Lilien & Rangaswamy, 1991).

An effective negotiation style that serves you well in domestic settings can be inappropriate when applied interculturally. In fact, its use can often result in more harm than gain (Altany, 1988; Frances, 1991; Peak, 1985). Heightened sensitivity, more attention to detail, and perhaps

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even changes in basic behavioral patterns are required when working in another culture (Moran, & Stripp, 1991).

Different cultural systems produce divergent negotiating styles shaped by each nation's culture, geography, history, and political system (Adler & Graham, 1989; Salacuse, 1991). Unless you see the world through the other person's eyes (no matter how similar he or she appears to you), you may not be sharing the same perceptions. Each person brings his or her cultural assumptions, images, and prejudices or other attitudinal baggage into any negotiating situation (Barnum & Walniansky, 1989).

In cross-cultural negotiations, many of the strategies and tactics used domestically may not apply, especially when they may be culturally unacceptable to the other party (Binnendijk, 1987; Burt, 1989; Druckman, Benton, Ali & Bagur, 1976). One succeeds in cross-cultural negotiations by fully understanding the other negotiating parties. This understanding is used to improve one's own advantage by: first realizing each party's expectations as expressed in the negotiations; and then by turning the negotiations into a win-win situation for both sides (Herbig & Kramer, 1992b).

### **NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR**

The most important emotional messages at the negotiating table are expressed nonverbally by gestures, tone of voice or facial expressions. People you negotiate with will most likely interpret your statements with stronger reliance on nonverbal messages than on what is actually said. An estimated 70 percent of meaning is derived from nonverbal cues during social interactions (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996). In fact, receivers tend to favor nonverbal over verbal interpretations when ambiguity is present (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; Kharbanda & Stallworthy, 1991).

Nonverbal behavior may be defined as any behavior, intentional or unintentional, exclusive of words, which can be interpreted by a receiver as having meaning (Kharbanda & Stallworthy, 1991). Nonverbal behaviors either accompany verbal messages or are used independently. They may affirm and emphasize or negate and even contradict spoken messages. Equally important, nonverbal behaviors vary from culture to culture and, due to their habitual and routine nature, are more likely to be used unconsciously and spontaneously (Munter, 1993; Adler, 1991).

The wide range of nonverbal behaviors can be divided into seven categories. The first of these categories includes the kinesic code, commonly called body language. Gestures, body and facial movements, and eye contact are included within this group. Vocalics, the second classification, refers to vocal activity that is not expressed in words. Also called paralanguage,

vocalics includes tone, volume, and vocal sounds other than verbal language. The third set of behaviors involve touching, and are placed in the haptic code. Fourth, proxemics refer to the use of space. The fifth category identifies the use of time and is labeled chronemics. Next, physical appearances, including body shape and size as well as clothing and jewelry, create the sixth group of nonverbal behaviors. Finally, the seventh category represents artifacts or objects that are associated with a person, such as one's desk, car, or books (Birdwhistell, 1952; Birdwhistell, 1955; Birdwhistell, 1963).

It should be emphasized that these codes do not usually function independently or sequentially. Instead, they normally work simultaneously (Birdwhistell, 1952; Fast, 1970). In addition, nonverbal behavior is continuous communication. Nonverbal cues are a vital part of interpersonal communications. However, these same messages may be ambiguous or even contradictory.

The meaning of any nonverbal message depends upon the individual involved, the context in which the message occurs, and the cultural backgrounds of the interacting people. Every contextual influence and nonverbal behavior is potentially significant during negotiations, including: the time of the meeting (morning, lunch time, late in the evening); the shape or the negotiating table (round, square); the lighting (white, in the middle of the room); the use of microphones; frequency and duration of breaks; phone calls; the space between the chairs; and the way the negotiators dress. Even "silent language" has a tremendous impact on the negotiation process. Former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold correctly summarized the importance of nonverbal behavior in the negotiation process: "The unspoken dialogue between two people can never be put right by anything they say." In negotiation, what is not said is in many cases more important than what is openly expressed by the parties involved. One word of caution: an individual gesture must be approached cautiously. Rather, clusters of behavior provide the greatest amount and the most accurate nonverbal meanings (Fast, 1970).

Effective negotiators are fully aware of the existence of all these factors, and they are able to use them to their advantage (Berlo, 1960; Hayakawa, 1949). Successful negotiators are particularly adept at controlling (consciously or unconsciously) their body language and concurrently responding to the many nonverbal cues that they receive from other negotiator(s). These skills are critical since the negotiator may unintentionally transmit false or confusing messages to his or her counterparts. Contrawise, the negotiator may not pick up on or misinterpret nonverbal messages being transmitted by the other side. Moreover, effective communications often require expression in such important nonverbal messages as gestures, tone of voice, or facial expressions (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; Lehman, Himstreet & Baty, 1996).



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Overall, awareness of nonverbal communication can lend tremendous insights into the cross-cultural negotiation process. First, it helps one more closely discern the intent of the other side's verbal expressions (Goleman, 1991; Hickson & Stacks, 1985). Secondly, nonverbal communication enables you to clarify your own message (Burns & Beier, 1973; Leathers, 1986; Mehrabian, 1971).

For these reasons, a crucial negotiation tactic is to always carefully observe the players. The following generalizations should help cross-cultural negotiators to interpret and send messages more effectively.

In most western cultures, strength of commitment is positively associated with the simplicity and directness of the negotiator's language. (These attributes are discussed at greater length in the upcoming "Low-Context versus High-Context" section.) Similarly, the more precisely that western cultures define a position, the higher the level of commitment to that position is likely to be (Lehman, Himstreet & Baty, 1996).

Other interpretive generalizations about nonverbal communications include body language such as crossed arms (indicating dislike for the message) and leaning forward (indicating a favorable reaction to the message). Nervousness can be implied by such signs as blushing, contraction of facial muscles, giggling, strained laughter, or silence. Finally, blinking is sometimes associated with feelings of guilt or fear (Burgoon & Saine, 1978; Mehrabian, 1972).

### **NOISE**

Cross-cultural "noise" consists of the background distractions that have nothing to do with the substance of the negotiator's message. Noise occurs more often in cross-cultural negotiations than in domestic settings, since a whole new range of nonverbal cultural differences may be introduced (Moran & Stripp, 1991; Pascale, 1978). Gestures and body postures with one meaning in a given culture can have a completely different significance in another culture.

The seven categories of nonverbal behavior introduced in the preceding section are the main causes of cross-cultural noise (Bovee & Thill, 1995). The confusion comes because such nonverbal behaviors may conflict with a negotiator's expectations and lead to misinterpretation of the situation, a message's intent, or even the very meaning of the message. At certain levels of intensity, noise makes it more difficult to pay attention to the central message (Bovee & Thill, 1995; Moran & Stripp, 1991; Pascale, 1978).

The adept negotiator recognizes potential sources of noise and consciously attempts to minimize its production. At the same time, he or she has prepared for likely noise elements from the other side of the table so as to minimize their effects on his or her performance. One such

potential noise to American negotiators is silence or the use of long pauses before responding during negotiations (Graham & Sano, 1989; March, 1983; Tung, 1982). The knowledgeable American negotiator is aware that the Japanese often use little verbal activity, nod frequently, use silence, even close eyes while others are speaking. These responses help them concentrate in Zen Buddhist fashion (Graham, 1986; Hawrysh & Zaichkowsky, 1990; Oikawa & Tanner, 1992; Swierczek, 1990). In addition, the Japanese use silence to project a favorable impression, implying deep concentration about the problem. When a negotiation impasse arises, the typical Japanese reply is silence, withdrawal, or change of subject (Graham, Kim, Lin & Robinson, 1988; Tung, 1989; Van Zandt, 1970).

Proxemics also give conflicting cues to cross-cultural interpretations. For example, Americans feel comfortable with spacial distance of two to four feet (and very little touching). In comparison, Mexicans and Italians typically get extremely close to their counterparts (Ober, 1995). Other cultures believe in virtually eyeball to eyeball contact; while Japanese and English prefer greater distances. As Fisher has stated, "[i]n addition, Mexicans use some physical contact to signal confidence, such as a hand on the upper arm" (Fisher, 1980). Mexicans communicate with hand movements, physical contact, and emotional expressions (Adler & Graham, 1989; Fisher, 1980; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996). In this context, "Americans who are standoffish from the *abrazo* (Latin American embrace) are probably a bit hard to take. They have signaled a certain coolness" (Fisher, 1980).

General social orientation creates an additional source of potential noise. Japanese politeness can at times come across as artificial and excessive to many Americans. To the Japanese, American directness and overbearing manners may signal a lack of self control and implicit untrustworthiness; at the very least it signals a lack of sincerity (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996). Likewise, as Fisher notes, "Americans may have difficulty playing the high status social role that goes with an important positions in societies such as Mexico. There is an art to being waited on and deferred to while at the same time being protective of the personal dignity of people in lower social positions" (Fisher, 1980). Conversely, American expressions of impatience and irritation when things do not work or delays are encountered create considerable "noise" in Mexico - both figuratively and literally. Mexican practices relating to the role of women create their share of noise, too (Adler & Graham, 1989; Fisher, 1980; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

American conduct also unknowingly creates noise for negotiators from other cultures. Problematic social behaviors include slouching, chewing gum, using first names, forgetting titles, joking, wearing too casual clothing, being overtly friendly towards the opposite sex, speaking too loudly, being too egalitarian with the wrong people (usually in lower social positions), working with one's hands, carrying bundles, and tipping too much (Copeland & Lewis, 1985; The Parker Pen Co., 1990).

Finally, eye contact is another common source of cross-cultural noise. An American attributes an unwillingness to engage in a frank conversation when an Indian does not make direct eye contact. From the alternate perspective, the Indian attributes the American with an attempt to control and dictate by means of direct physical confrontation. To look away is a sign of showing respect to Indians. However, in the United States, respect is shown by looking directly at the speaker. In contrast, the French have direct and intense eye contact, which Americans often attribute to aggressiveness and stubbornness. Meanwhile, the French person is likely to attribute weakness, casualness, and insincerity to the American when the intense gaze is not returned or avoided (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; Frank, 1992).

### **LOW-CONTEXT VERSUS HIGH CONTEXT**

Cultures can be either predominantly verbal or nonverbal. In verbal communications, information is transmitted through a code that makes meanings both explicit and specific (Boone & Kurtz, 1996). In nonverbal communications, the nonverbal aspects become the major channel for transmitting meaning. This interpretive framework is called context. Hall (1989) incorporated this factor into a useful model for communication analysis. Context is the oral and nonverbal characteristics of communication that surround a word or passage and clarify its meaning. Context also refers to the situational factors of implicit and cultural norms that affect communications.

High- and low-context refers to the amount of information that is conveyed in a given message. Nonverbal examples include: eye contact, pupil contraction and dilation, facial expression, odor, color, hand gestures, body movement, proximity, and use of space (Bovee & Thill, 1995). In addition, paralingual context indicators include: rate of speech; vocal pitch or tone; vocal intensity or loudness; vocal flexibility or adaptability to specific situations; variations of rate, pitch and intensity; overall vocal quality; and the fluency, expressional patterns and nuances in vocal delivery (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

The more communication relies on context in any given culture, the more difficult it is for one to accurately convey or decode the explicit contents of a message. High-context cultures can be found in East Asia (Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam), Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Arabic countries, Spain, and France), the Middle East, and to a lesser extent in Latin and South America (Boone & Kurtz, 1994). On the other hand, it is easier to communicate with a person from a culture in which context contributes relatively little to a message (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995). Low-context cultures include the Anglo-American, Germanic, and Scandinavian countries (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

A high-context communication is one in which most of the information is either found in the physical surroundings or internalized in the person. Little meaning is contained in the explicit message that is transmitted. As a result, interpretation relies heavily on the social setting, the external environment, and associated nonverbal behavior. Members of high-context cultures are socialized from birth to depend primarily on covert clues given within the context of the message delivered verbally. Subtlety is valued in high-context culture languages (such as Arabic, Japanese, Chinese), and much meaning is conveyed by inference. In some high-context cultures, seemingly harmless and even mundane behavior, such as crossing one's leg, exposing the soles of one's shoes, or putting hands in one's pockets are considered to be in poor taste, offensive, and insulting to the host (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; The Parker Pen Co., 1990).

In high-context cultures, relationships between individuals are relatively long lasting with deep personal involvement. Members from these cultures will focus their energies and time on developing understanding and trust with negotiators and give less attention to the specifics of the deal. Furthermore, a member of a high-context culture will only negotiate in earnest when convinced of the other party's integrity and reliability. High-context businesspeople depend heavily upon confidence derived from interpersonal relations instead of upon a strong and independent legal system for conflict resolution. As a result, agreements tend to be spoken rather than written (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; McCall & Warrington, 1987). For example, the Japanese believe that if the situation changes, the contract should be renegotiated (Graham, 1986; Graham & Sano, 1989; Griffin & Daggatt, 1990).

In high-context countries, negotiators require sufficient knowledge of the culture to communicate understandably and acceptably. In these settings, insiders tend to be clannish (Graham, 1986; Graham & Sano, 1989; Griffin & Daggatt, 1990; Herbig & Kramer, 1992b). Only when negotiators are in a position to share the same perceptions as their partners, can they forge comfortable and satisfactory relationships. Case in point: the Japanese believe in intuitive mutual understanding and are adept at the analysis of nonverbal behavior. They do not understand why Westerners talk so much and often appear to contradict each other while at the bargaining table. The Japanese can relate large amounts of information to one another with merely a glance, a movement, or even silence (Graham, 1988; Graham & Sano, 1989; Griffin & Daggatt, 1990; Hall & Hall, 1987; Herbig & Kramer, 1992a). *Haragei* (belly language) is the Japanese expression which implies being able to communicate without words. During verbal discussions, the Japanese often talk around a subject, believing that the idea should be discovered from the context (Herbig & Kramer, 1992a; Herbig & Kramer, 1992b; Ikle, 1982; Kramer, 1989).

In other cultures, there have actually been cases of entire communities (Sicilian) that are able to carry on conversations by gestures alone. For Russians, silence should not be taken as

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consent but rather as disapproval. Silence leaves Russians with their options completely open. They can either say nothing, implying acquiescence and approval, or later express disapproval and state that they had never agreed to any such thing. Or they can do both at different times depending on their interests at the moment (Dreyfus & Roberts, 1988; Graham, Evenko & Rajan, 1992; Nite, 1985; Samuelson, 1984; Smith, 1989).

High-context communications are faster, more economical, more efficient and more satisfying. However, without common understanding between sender and receiver most interpersonal communications are incomplete. High-context individuals are seeking information on multifaceted levels beyond the spoken word. Yet, the spoken word is primary message when dealing with low-context cultures. Due to this phenomenon, low-context individuals are quite confused by the ambiguity contained in the spoken or written answers of high-context individuals (Bovee & Thill, 1995). In comparison, members of high-context cultures, such as Mexicans, look at their U.S. counterparts as more structured, rigid, and direct. Often Mexicans are unable to speak frankly about some matter due to the desire to save face (Boone & Kurtz, 1994).

Within a low-context culture, the written word is binding, regardless of what evolves later. For high-context cultures, the human side of the negotiation process is more important than the technical aspects (Boone & Kurtz, 1994). Form and substance are inextricably linked in the high-context society. The Russians are considerably higher context than U.S. culture. Issues involving authority, risk, control, and their possible impact on the relationships among negotiating parties are so important that these concerns must be resolved before any commitment can be given to negotiation agenda items (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Dreyfus & Roberts, 1988; Graham, Evenko & Rajan, 1992; Nite, 1985; Samuelson, 1984; Smith, 1989).

In a low-context communication, information is transmitted through an explicit code to make up for a lack of shared meanings and words. In low-context cultures, the environment, situation, and nonverbal behavior are relatively less important; and more explicit detail-oriented information has to be given. A direct style of communications is valued and ambiguity is not well regarded (Bovee & Thill, 1995). Furthermore, relationships between individuals are relatively shorter in duration and personal involvement tends to be valued less. These characteristics can be linked to the tendency for low-context countries to be more heterogeneous and prone to greater social and job mobility. Insiders and outsiders are less closely distinguished, and foreigners find it relatively easier to adjust, since immigration is more acceptable. Accordingly, cultural patterns tend to change faster in low-context societies. In addition, authority is diffused through a bureaucratic system which makes personal responsibility difficult (Dodd, 1991).

In low-context cultures, agreements tend to be written rather than spoken and treated as final and legally binding. Initial relationship creation and emotional expressions may be passed

over fairly rapidly. U.S. businesspeople tend to be low-context. They prefer to focus on substantive issues; "Just the facts please" (Hall, 1989). Another traditionally low-context group of people, the Germans, do not appreciate emotional gestures; hands should never be used to emphasize points. Calm under pressure is their motto. Similarly, U.S. negotiators assume that the only natural and effective way to present ideas is by factual logic. (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

### ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

In some areas of the world, it is customary to overstate a case, while understatement is the norm in others. Equally important, interpreters are essential in many cross-cultural negotiations because neither party has an adequate command of the other party's language. This challenge holds particularly true with Arabic states and with the so-called Pacific Rim countries (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996). Some of these languages are so flexible in their translatability that it would be unwise to accept agreement in them.

Arabic is such a language, since official Arabic is divorced from the language of everyday life. This cultural reality is most strongly reflected in the communication flexibility of literate Arabs (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Casse & Deal, 1985; Wells, 1977; Wright, 1981). Flexible communications and translations are manifested in multi-interpretational thoughts, and in emphasis on the psychological significance of linguistic symbols rather than actual meaning. Often, Arabs will tend to fit the thought to the word rather than the word to the thought. Within these norms, words become substitutes for thought rather than their representation.

In Arabic, over-exaggeration and over-assertion become natural means of expression. Thus, a simple statement in English cannot be literally translated into Arabic without losing part of its meaning. This custom can lead to misunderstandings in negotiation by non-Arabs who are unaware of this language use. Within their own countries, Arabs are compelled to assert and over-exaggerate to avoid misunderstanding. When an Arab says something simply, without exaggeration, other Arabs might think the speaker means the opposite. Arabs also often fail to realize that non-Arab speakers mean exactly what they say when messages are sent in a simple, unelaborated manner. To many Arabs, a direct and simple "no" may be perceived as a sign to continue (Wright, 1981).

While the spoken word remains one of the most powerful and flexible tools of negotiation communication, translation of meaning draws from many more sources. As previously discussed, there are a multitude of graphic, olfactory, tactile, spatial, temporal, and symbolic signs that reduce the ambiguity of spoken language. Application of these nonverbal symbols assist the interpretation of spoken language, particularly in relation to expressions of negotiator

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emotions, and attitudes (Burns & Beier, 1973). These applications are evident when others exploit American willingness to talk by consciously making Americans uncomfortable with silence. The underlying goal is to maximize American disclosure (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

Emotions affect the ability to negotiate because every emotion brings with it an impetus to take action related to the shown emotion. Emotions can also effect messages sent as well as received by negotiators, and can be used to manipulate counterpart actions. Emotions have also been successfully used as a tactic. Stalin alternated between friendly, cordial discussions and adversarial or even hostile outbursts. His emotional tactics threw the other negotiators off balance and helped strengthen a weak negotiating position. Other Soviet leaders also used this tactic (e.g., Khrushchev's shoe banging in the United Nations). Nevertheless, such tactics should be used cautiously since they can often result in much greater loss than any foreseeable negotiations gain. To avoid related problems, the negotiator has to be sensitive to emotions being displayed by his or her counterpart, particularly when emotions arise from states such as anxiety, feelings of displeasure, or shame (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Fisher, 1980; Fisher & Ury, 1983; Ricks, 1983).

It is likely that intangible issues related to the anticipated or actual loss of public face or self-esteem will emerge, when a negotiator takes the view that his or her counterpart is being unjustly demanding, unreasonably resistant to proposals or abusive in the exercise of power. The negotiator is likely to react protectively to these perceptions. For example, such emotions can manifest themselves in a stream of external nonverbal signals about an internal state. These messages may be encoded as facial expressions and other gestures, which are sometimes supplemented by vocalizations such as grunts and groans.

Being attuned to the unique characteristics of visual expression in a culture is required to understand the degree of emotional intensity. Within each culture there is a perfectly clear range of visual expression from mild to intense. Some cultures, including certain Asian nations, inhibit emotional expression more than others. Other cultures, are much more demonstrative, such as the Italian, Greek, and most Latin American ones (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

Perceptions of one party's emotions by the other are not always accurate. The Japanese are not viewed as emotional by other cultures, but consider themselves to be passionate. To Latin Americans, the Norte Americano is a "dead corpse" with no color, too serious in business, and unable to loosen up and enjoy life. On the other hand, Asians often consider Americans too demonstrative in business settings, revealing such emotions as anger, frustration, and disappointment. A display of anger is particularly destructive to Asians, and it should not be expressed. Within an Asian perspective, anger disturbs harmony (Burt, 1989; de Ferrer, 1989; Gulbro & Herbig, 1994; Graham, 1988; The Parker Pen Co., 1990).



Differences in cross-cultural body language can also be factored into the emotional interpretations of negotiators. In many cultures, beckoning to someone with the forefinger is considered ill-mannered. Never touch an Arab on the top of the head, for that is where the soul resides. Similarly, never show the sole of one's shoe to an Arab, or use the left hand with a Moslem, since these gestures can be interpreted as rude. Americans, Germans, and Russians shake hands forcefully; however, in some parts of Europe a polite handshake is usually quick and to the point (The Parker Pen Co., 1990). Furthermore, an Asian might view an American as too abrupt and heavy-handed after a typical American handshake, while an American might perceive less firm handshakes as unassertive (Hall, 1989). Laughter and giggling in the West indicate humor, yet these behaviors often indicate embarrassment and humility in Asia (Harris & Moran, 1991; Moran, 1987). Latins embrace one another at the end of a successful negotiation; Central and Eastern Europeans not only embrace but kiss each other on the cheek.

For strategic reasons signals are often sent that are not genuine. For example, a buyer does not always wish to reveal his or her desire to have a particular product or service in case his or her counterpart revises the negotiation objectives upwards. Moreover, personal inclinations and interests of one or both the negotiating parties may be at odds with the interests of the organizations that they represent. For the preceding reasons, opening moves and concessions allow each party to gauge the other's preferences and intentions. In turn, this feedback gives each negotiator the opportunity to present or misrepresent information.

## EXAMPLES OF NONVERBAL CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

There are many forms of nonverbal communication that can be adapted to improve cross-cultural negotiations. Some examples are described here under the following categories: Agreements; Body Language; Social Behaviors; Silence/Paralanguage; and Emotions.

### Agreements

The Arabs want direct, face-to-face discussions, but do not like to bring open disagreements into a formal session. In fact, rather than voice disagreement, many Arabs will say they agree. Then they will take actions that gently hint at their disagreement, hoping that the other party will get the message. In Algeria, an American consultant noted: "My clients never disagree with my recommendations. They just do not try to implement the ones they dislike" (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Wright, 1981).

In certain cultures, people will seldom provide a direct "no," even if they disagree (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Wright, 1981). Among Arabs, hesitation signals that disagreement exists. Furthermore, a person of status is not expected to hesitate over an answer. If you don't know, stall; but don't admit that you don't know.



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The Japanese are also so uncomfortable with open conflict that they hardly ever express it directly. They talk around it, or do not react at all, or give indirect hints that they disagree. In general, they hardly ever say no directly. One must infer "no" from the way they say "yes." Depending on the exact word, a Japanese says "yes" he may mean "no" and often "maybe" but rarely an unconditional "yes." "Hai" means "yes" but it indicates understanding rather than agreement. If a Japanese draws breath between his or her teeth and says something like "sah" or "it is very difficult" he or she means "no." The Japanese claim to have as many as twenty or more ways to expressing "no" without having to say it.

### **Body Language**

The meanings of body language vary widely according to specific cultures. Saudi Arabians look closely into another's eyes to gauge honesty through observing the movements of the pupil. In comparison, U.S. citizens think that keeping direct eye contact is a sign of openness, honesty and assertiveness. Still other cultures view it as confrontational, aggressive, hostile, and rude.

Italians, Arabs, and Latin Americans use their hands a great deal to emphasize or support what they are saying (Campbell, Graham, Jilbert & Meissner, 1988; The Parker Pen Co., 1990). United States citizens use hands for verbal support less often, but value firm handshakes. In contrast, the French shake hands without particular conviction and without even a verbal greeting, which a German may misread as indifference. The Japanese interpersonal communication style includes less eye contact, fewer negative facial expressions and more periods of silence (Graham, Kim & Andrews, 1987; Graham, 1981; Graham, 1984a; Graham, 1984b; Heiba, 1984; Hendon & Hendon, 1990; Kramer, 1989; March, 1985).

In Bulgaria, nodding one's head means "no" while shaking one's head means "yes." A "thumbs up" gesture is considered vulgar in Iran but friendly in Brazil. Folding your arms may be considered disrespectful by a Fijian. Pointing at something with a finger is considered rude in many places in Africa. In Greece, waving may be taken as an insult. The "A-OK" gesture, considered perfectly appropriate in the U.S.A., is likely to be viewed as obscene by a Brazilian (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995; Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996; The Parker Pen Co., 1990).

### **Social Behaviors**

In Japan and the Arab countries business negotiations are often combined with social activities. One purpose of these activities is to demonstrate hospitality. Another, more serious purpose is to determine whether you are the sort of person with whom they want to do business. In fact, the social process can be as important as the negotiations process. In these settings, discussing business at the wrong time is an easy way to create a bad impression. Good manners are very important to the Japanese, and the Portuguese prefer that no business be discussed at

a meal until the conversation is complete and coffee is served (Adler, 1991; Altany, 1988; Druckman, Benton, Ali & Bagur, 1976; Ghauri, 1988; Harris & Moran, 1991; Hendon & Hendon, 1990; Ikle, 1982; Moran & Stripp, 1991; The Parker Pen Co., 1990; Wright, 1981).

### **Silence and Paralanguage**

The Japanese often use little verbal activity, nod frequently, use silence, and even close eyes while others are speaking. Silence to a Japanese means one is projecting a favorable impression and is thinking deeply about the problem. When reaching a negotiation impasse, the typical Japanese response is silence, withdrawal or change of subject. Japanese are more influenced by what is not said, and often prefer a third party to serve as a "buffer" in negotiations (Graham, Kim & Andrews, 1987; Graham, 1981; Graham, 1984a; Graham, 1984b; Heiba, 1984; Hendon & Hendon, 1990; Kramer, 1989; March, 1985).

As with body language, paralinguistic norms can be quite diverse when compared between cultures. Anglo-saxon speakers tend to use unvarying inflections when they are bored or are attempting to show sarcasm. In contrast, Russian speakers use level tones when conveying neutral, non-emotion laden information. Therefore, a Russian negotiator may come across negatively when he or she is merely trying to remain neutral (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

When a negotiator communicates in a foreign language he or she must not only use correct grammar and idioms, but must also use the inflections and rhythms associated with the meanings to be conveyed. For example, in Middle-Eastern, Latin American, and many Mediterranean cultures, speakers tend to speak more volubly and with greater seeming emotion than is normal in the U.S.A. In turn, U.S.A. negotiators often speak more forcefully than negotiators from many European cultures. These differences should be kept in mind in order to convey the intended emotional content in a negotiation (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier, 1996).

### **Displays of Emotions**

The range, use, and manipulation of emotions varies dramatically across the globe. Some Asian cultures inhibit emotional expressions. Indians do not approve of displays of emotion, and Chinese negotiators rarely telegraph their next move through a show of emotions. With the Chinese, the level of friendliness or impersonality remains the same whether negotiations are approaching agreement or failure.

Other cultures, such as in Latin American and the Mediterranean countries, are much more demonstrative. "Italians tend to be extremely hospitable, but are often volatile in temperament. When they make a point, they do so with considerable gesticulation and emotional expression" (Rearden, 1982). Moreover, Italians enjoy haggling over prices and dressing in a flamboyant

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style. In addition, emotional cues can be misleading. A Thai's laughter in meetings may not indicate amusement. Often, laughter is an embarrassed response when the Thai does not understand a negotiator's point or simply does not wish to reply (Boone & Kurtz, 1994; Bovee & Thill, 1995).

Finally, some cross-cultural negotiating teams strategically encourage emotional stress in counterparts. Stress, the body's response to unusual demands, can be created in many ways to produce concessions by the other side. For example, during the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev Moscow summit, the Soviet negotiators frequently changed the setting and agenda of the meetings. They also refused to provide the Americans with access to telecommunications equipment and administrative support. These tactics produced considerable stress for the U.S. negotiators, who feared (justifiably) that the Soviets were electronically monitoring their conversations.

### CONCLUSIONS

Negotiating across cultures carries the risk of misperception. Potential danger arises from nonverbal cues with divergent cultural meanings. Often, nonverbal behaviors are either over- or under-emphasized for the norms of their particular context. Gestures and expressions embody subtle complexities that vary considerably in their meaning from one culture to another. Thus, misinterpretation can easily occur.

As trust is an essential component to effective negotiation, negotiators must immerse themselves in the culture with which they are interacting. Through careful pre-negotiation training and research, negotiators can familiarize themselves with their counterpart's nonverbal symbols, and create a favorable impression. This strategy also increases the likelihood of optimal interpretation, even if a counterpart deliberately manipulate cues.

In conclusion, an understanding and acceptance of these nonverbal customs can smooth the bargaining process. Even more important, these steps will increase the likelihood of positive negotiation outcomes for all parties.

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