

Chapter 1

Project Communication Management

1.1 How to Conduct a Meeting in an Intercultural Setting¹

Contents: Reading • Assignments • Student Engineers' Commentaries

NOTE: Several students contributed to the readings in the module. Their names are listed by their commentaries. The preparation of this module and others in the "Preparing for Engineering Communication in Developing COuntries" was supported by a generous grant from the Engineering Information Foundation. We are grateful for their belief that today's engineering students need information that will prepare them to deal with international collaborations.

1.1.1 MODULE READING

1.1.1.1 Conducting Meetings in Intercultural Settings

As demonstrated in the module, **How to Detect Cultural Differences**, surface differences in cultures usually reflect differences in the deep structure of cultures. Meetings exhibit these same differences as well. In addition to the explicit differences in the surface features of meetings, you should also learn a basic negotiation process that the Harvard Negotiation Project has taught for many years and used as a model for analyzing international as well as interpersonal negotiations. It involves four basic steps that are fairly easy to grasp and that you can apply to many intercultural situations.

NOTE: The book that most concisely explains this process is **GETTING TO YES! Negotiating Agreement without Giving In**, which you can buy at most bookstores for under \$15. The title could easily be reworded as **GETTING TO YES! Negotiating Agreement While Creating Mutual Benefits** because it is NOT about overcoming opposition. It is about discovering solutions that will satisfy parties with different desires.

The Harvard Process breaks down into four steps:

1. Finding out people's reasons or interests (also called separating people from positions)
2. Inventing options for mutual gains
3. Choosing objective criteria
4. Reaching agreement

There are good reasons for using this four-step process. By seeking to understand people's motivations and working out a set of objective criteria, you have a better chance of discovering the underlying or deep

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m14681/1.3/>>.

cultural values may very much affect the long-term success of any agreement or discussion. Some differences in cultural values can affect the process, such as whether “truth” depends on empirical verification or on faith/desire/received belief. However, patient and calm use of this method seems to have several advantages.

1.1.1.2 1. Finding out people’s reasons or interests

Very often, our usual friends think they know what they want: to pay \$5000 for a used car, to have the family at home for Christmas dinner, or to be sent on a two[U+2011]year project in Mexico. If those wishes can’t be fulfilled immediately, people need to negotiate. To avoid settling, for a compromise that satisfies no one, people need to find out what motivates the other negotiator’s requests. You have to “separate” people from their declared objective and find out why that objective matters to them. You have to say things like:

"How will this benefit you?"

"Why did you want to do this?"

"Have you seen this work well for some other person / organization / firm?"

"How do you believe this would work out better than what we did last time?"

"Could you let me know more about how this fits with your goals?"

Try to memorize or "burn these into your neural pathways" so that it will be easy to put forward a helpful question. All of these questions are intended to find out what needs must be satisfied for the other negotiator to reach "YES." At the same time, you want to make clear your own interests in the situation. What benefits are you seeking? What reasons do you have for negotiating? Be careful how you go about reaching, "Yes," because often the method of negotiation is s important to success.

In intercultural negotiation, some participants may not want to reveal their motives to you. Your two most valuable tools for making sure you understand them are **paraphrase** and **indirect narratives**. Paraphrase is restating your understanding in other terms. If they are reluctant to explain their reasons, just invite the other party to correct you where you’re wrong, and summarize what you think are their reasons. In general, people are quite happy to tell you where you’re wrong and will jump back into the process to correct you, although if you have a great deal more power than they do, they may follow a cultural prescription that says, “Tell the boss YES, the boss is always right.” In general, if you emphasize your desire to understand the other person’s language correctly, you may be able to overcome this rule because positioning yourself as the willing learner makes it more likely that the other person will take the position of the one “more knowledgeable about the language.”

Do not agree to anything at this first stage. If you’re asked to agree or promise, you must say, “I understand what you said. I can’t agree at this stage in the meeting. I have to understand what is important about this project/idea/object before we talk about whether it is the best possibility.”

1.1.1.3 2. Inventing options for mutual gains

Once you have a clear sense of the other person’s or the community’s reasons for taking a position (making a request), you should begin a separate phase of the discussion. By that I mean that you should specifically say that the exploration of reasons is closed and that you aren’t yet choosing a result.

You want to make clear that you want the other party to help you invent options that will benefit you both. For example, projects must satisfy community needs, but they must also be ones that the team has the knowledge and funds to carry out. Try to come up with new ways of meeting as many needs or interests as you can. Think "outside the box." For example, in everyday life in the US, changing the timing or the financing may enable the buyer to agree to a higher price if keeping the monthly payments down is a key concern. In a project, you may be able to undertake a larger project that the village wants if you can do it in stages or if they can contribute more labor or resources.

In engineering projects, there may be a very good reason to have separate meetings for understanding needs or reasons and for imagining solutions because the engineering team can reasonably say that its members need to do some preliminary work before they can discuss a range of ideas. The team needs time to analyze and be creative. It may need to learn more about local materials, supplies, or conditions before more can be negotiated.

YOU MUST NOT RESPOND NEGATIVELY TO POSSIBILITIES. Criticism of an option during this phase will bring the negotiation to a halt, fast. Nothing kills creativity faster than comments such as, “We already tried that and it didn’t work.” “Do you think we’re made of money?” or “That’s not what we came here for.” Instead, try to acknowledge that you’ve heard each possibility by restating it, sometimes separating it from any commitment: “I can see that as an option, but I don’t want to commit to it until after we’ve fully explored the possibilities.”

1.1.1.4 3. Choosing objective criteria

No one wants to live with an unjust agreement. A bargain that is too harsh is one participants can’t live with, and it may come unraveled. Insist on objective criteria. Such criteria might be

- the project fits in with the community’s cultural practices,
- the project could be accomplished with the local equipment available and with the funds the students had raised,
- the project could meet safety standards, professional standards, and legal requirements, or
- the project would provide equal benefits for all parties.

Engineers without Borders only works on projects that benefit the community as a whole, so that would certainly be a major criterion.

If someone insists on an unreasonable criterion, then be prepared to go with your BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) instead of the agreement. Thinking about your best alternatives in advance will help you be more comfortable if the deal falls through. For example, knowing how much it will cost you to ship your equipment back to the States will help you figure out whether selling your equipment when you leave at a low price or giving it to another non-government agency is your best alternative.

1.1.1.5 4. Reaching agreement

Once you have chosen criteria, apply them to your options. At this point it is easier for all parties to rank the possibilities and perhaps to combine features to reach an optimal deal. At this time it is also a good idea to plan how you will deal with any problems that may come up later. Different cultures tend to have different ideas about how binding contracts are. The Japanese are reputed to believe contracts can always be renegotiated; US companies tend to believe a contract’s provisions must be enforced. Deciding to go with negotiation, mediation, or binding arbitration may lower a company’s legal bills later.

What if they don’t “play fair” by US cultural standards?

Many popular US negotiation tactics emphasize power gains and hard bargaining. What if the other side huffs and puffs and makes demands or threats? In intercultural collaborative projects, US personnel may be seen as rich imperialists. Villagers may resent having to do what student engineers propose and may attempt to pressure teams to agree to large-scale projects that the student teams do not have funds to complete. Demands may seem only just to the villagers when the differences in wealth and educational opportunities are so great. What if they plead or play upon your status as a wealthy foreign engineer to pressure you to agree without going through the four stages of the process we’ve described?

If you know your BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement), you can make more objective judgments. Don’t agree to rules you can’t live with. Suppose that other side refuses to separate themselves from their position, saying, to put it in a US idiom, “Take it or leave it!” You can respond by playing out the right process verbally in their presence and inviting them to participate.

- “OK, Señor Martinez, I heard you say that the regional coordinator promised you we would do this very large project and that you can’t accept anything else, but before I leave, I’m going to go through what I imagine your reasons to be and what I think mine are. Just speak at any time and correct me if I’m wrong.”
- “As I see it, your community would benefit from the multiple-stage process by”
- “The possibility of our constructing this project in stages would benefit us by”

- "Using the criteria we discussed would rule out doing the whole project right away because"
- "However, building the structure first and then (for example) redesigning the stoves to accommodate the cooking vessels for the community laundry in two stages would meet the criteria of being good for the village as a whole, would allow us time to raise funds that will be necessary for the second stage, etc."

When you have the situation wrong, the other side seldom can resist telling you so, which in turn gives you a better view of their reasons and interests.

It is better to separate a negotiation into stages and hold a second or third or fourth meeting than to accept or withdraw hastily. The differences in languages can nearly always justify offering to come together later after your team has had a chance to gather more information, get clarification, contact someone for background on costs, rules, and so on, and talk together as a team. Before the next meeting, you can talk as a team to think of what deep culture values, such as having all members of the village benefit equally, may be offended if you choose to pay funds to one group or one individual. It may feel that you are working in slow motion when you intended to accomplish many things quickly, but being deliberate and warmly cordial can help you keep from making a major, poor agreement.

1.1.1.6 Games People Play at Meetings—and How to Stop Them

Several years ago a noted psychologist, Eric Berne, described games people play in a book by the same name. Two of those games, fairly harmless ones, can take a lot of time in a meeting and block productive action: "Ain't It Awful" and "Why Don't You, Yes But." You can certainly indulge in these when you want to, but sometimes you'll want to recognize them and stop them so that the group can move on to other actions.

Ain't It Awful is played by two or more people who take turns describing offensive, unsatisfactory, or "awful" things—the weather, the lack of parking, the obtuseness of professors, the taste of the food, and so on. Each person assures the other that what he or she has described really is "awful" and then goes on to add a tale of his or her own:

Example 1.1

- **Billybob:** Sheez, those beans tasted terrible. I think they must have been on the stove for a week.
- **Carleen:** You're right, they should have served them with antacids. But I thought the salad was worse. I found a bug crawling on one of my lettuce leaves, and that orange stuff looked like melted plastic.
- **Billybob:** The dorm food is horrible. I'll bet they stay up nights figuring out what to disguise as food for breakfast

To stop "Ain't It Awful," you have to switch to negotiation and separate Billybob from the problem: "Well, have you asked them to serve something else? What would you really enjoy?"

"Why Don't You, Yes But" can be played by any number (two or more). One of the persons must play the role of the "refuser" who deflects all proposed solutions by saying "Yes, but . . ." and adding at least one reason that a proposed solution wouldn't work.

Example 1.2

- **Carleen:** You're right, they should have served them with antacids. I really mean it. We should be able to pick them up and put them on our trays.
- **Billybob:** Yes, but the administration would never approve that because it would be practicing medicine without a license and someone would complain that we were encouraging people to medicate themselves unnecessarily.
- **Carleen:** Maybe so. We could get a petition up with a list of the things we want them to serve at each meal and they could pick stuff just from that list.

- **Billybob:** Yes, but they want to be able to take advantage of special sales, and besides, we'd never get everyone to agree because some of the kids have such limited preferences.
 - **Carleen:** Maybe we could get the dietician at the health center to draw up a list of acceptable choices.
 - **Billybob:** Yes, but he probably wouldn't put anything on the list that we really like, like pizza. Yuck! It would probably all be rabbit food.
 - . . . and so on.
- To stop "Why Don't You, Yes But," use a question to seize the role that Billybob has been playing and ask him (or her) for his ideas about solving the problem:
 - . . . Carleen: You're right, Billybob. If the dietician isn't the right solution, what do you think we should do?

Example 1.3

As soon as Billybob replies, Carleen can then say, "Yes, but . . ." An even better strategy is, at that point, to shift into finding out motivations and desires and then move into the negotiation sequence and invent options for mutual benefits.

1.1.1.7 How to Apply Negotiation Principles to Other Meetings

Not all meetings are intended to resolve differences. You've probably attended some that celebrated a victory or accomplishment or one that brought people together after being away from campus all summer. Some of those meetings may have turned into a consideration of future proposals or recent problems. At that point, you can shift overtly or subtly into the four points of the negotiation strategy:

1. Finding out people's reasons or interests
2. Inventing options for mutual benefits
3. Choosing objective criteria
4. Reaching a principled agreement.

It's really simple, once you get that framework in mind!

1.1.1.8 Understanding What You're Told in a Negotiation

Problems can arise when people do not speak fluently the language in which they are communicating. They may not hear the exact meaning that another has expressed. In most languages there are multiple ways of expressing an idea. Not all statements of agreement mean the same thing. In Mexico there are at least five different ways of promising, with these different meanings:

1. *Me comprometo* = I commit myself
2. *Yo le aseguro* = I assure you
3. *Si, como no, lo hago* = Yes, sure I will do it.
4. *Tal vez lo hago* = Maybe I will do it
5. *Tal vez lo haga* = Maybe I might do it.

These meanings are arranged in a hierarchy starting with the most committed intention and ending with the least committed. In **Understanding Intercultural Communication**, Samovar, Porter, and Jain point out that "this agreement concept ranges from a durable agreement that everyone recognizes to an agreement being unlikely. The problem, of course, is to understand the differences . . . in their cultural sense so that a correct version can be rendered in another language." In some cultures, such as Mexico, refusing a request is judged to be extremely impolite; as a result, a person may be evasive. Since Americans

believe in being direct and assertive, they may be extremely frustrated when they have been told, “Yes, I will work on the project on Saturday,” but the person does not show up. In this case the local person may have been saying “yes” in a less committed way that the US listener misunderstood. The speaker expressed a form of agreement just to preserve the friendly relationship.

NOTE: It is wise to ask a local contact about how people express commitment, promises, and excuses so that you can listen for the degree of agreement and not fail to understand the level of commitment that someone is expressing.

Summary: When you hold a meeting in an intercultural setting, differences in status, values, background, and education can foster quite different expectations and cause misunderstanding. To achieve mutual agreement, follow a process that separates four steps (the basis of the Harvard Negotiation Process as set out by Fisher, Ury, and Potter): find out people’s motivations or interests, invent options for mutual gains, choose objective criteria, and reach agreement. Tools like paraphrasing and indirect narratives may be helpful depending upon the culture. Remaining positive, respectful, and flexible or firm when necessary are keys to success.

1.1.2 ASSIGNMENT

This assignment occurs in two parts, A and B. We thank Sean McCudden for his help in developing this assignment.

Part A.

During the first visit to Las Flores, the three-person engineering team decided that on future visits it should live in the village. Their faculty advisor had recommended that they do so, arguing that they would learn more about the local culture and ways of doing things than if they stayed in Nuevo Guerrero, about a two-hour drive over difficulty roads.

The team’s next visit is timed to occur when school is not in session, so the team believes they should be able to sleep at the school, where there is room for their bedrolls, equipment, and space for working together. It is a small building with no glass in the windows and a hard-packed dirt floor. Furthermore, Olivia Cera, the sister of a community leader, Juan Cera, has offered to cook for them and bring their meals to the school house. Indeed, the people of Las Flores have very few resources, and feeding the team for nine days would be a burden to any family. The team feels it must pay for its shelter and meals.

The team will offer to pay for their meals (they hope \$20 per person per day will be enough, but they also could pay by bringing Olivia the new stove that she wants). They must also determine whether there will be a charge for staying in the school during the five-day visit.

Questions. What differences in initial positions and in deep values do you think might surface in this meeting? Write a paragraph forecasting some of the differences in the team’s and Juan’s benefits and motives. How might these differences affect the team’s relationship with the village people if the team agrees to the request?

Part B.

The Engineers without Borders team is returning to the village of Las Flores. Part of its mission is to test the community’s water for bacteria. In order to incubate the samples overnight, the team has brought a gasoline-powered generator from the United States. The community’s power resources are limited. During its last visit the team installed solar panels, but there is no battery storage. The people in Las Flores have no other source for electricity. They thought providing their own energy source was the least they could do; further, without battery storage the team would not have any electricity overnight. The generator would come with them, stay with them, and leave with them.

When Juan saw the generator, one of the first questions he asked was how much it cost. The team told him, which must have been a significant portion of his income, and he asked if he could buy it. The team was taken aback, by Juan’s offer. They told Juan they would consider it, but they had to think about it first.

The team sat in the school house and discussed Juan's offer. They had brought it because of the short duration of the visit and the limitations of the electrical resources in Las Flores. They had failed to recognize it as a luxury for a community with a vastly disparate standard of living. They realized that they should have expected Juan's offer. The team decided that the generator would be more valuable in Las Flores than in a storage room at the university. The team agreed among themselves that it would be better to sell it to Juan.

However, the next morning Juan changed his offer to a trade: free meals from his relative, Olivia, who had agreed to cook for the team during this visits, in exchange for the generator. This brought back memories of another cultural misunderstanding that occurred during a previous trip to another village a few years back. The team had agreed to pay Sara in cash because when the organization had used a system of exchange for material goods, it had caused conflict in the community, which perceived the team's exchange as unwarranted gifts–favoritism.

The team is now convinced that it cannot “give” the generator to any individual because it wants to maintain a perception of equality in a community in which they are seen as “wealthy Americans who have expensive tools.” To the villagers, the generator–tangible and immediately useful–seems to be more valuable than the team's abstract promises of cleaner water and healthier bodies. The team takes electricity for granted and had instead focused on what it considered to be a more basic need–water quality–but which was less exciting to the community.

Questions

Why do you think Juan changed his request? How would selling the generator to Juan affect the team's relationship to the community? What options for mutual benefit might the team devise, keeping in mind the differences in cultures that the situation reveals? What options do you think Juan would propose? If the woman is to do the work that “pays” for the generator, should she be the one to own it? Come up with at least two options and the criteria that you think should govern the decision.

1.1.3 STUDENT ENGINEERS' COMMENTARIES

1.1.3.1 Roque Sanchez: Meetings and Meeting the Challenges of Intercultural Communication

After my unprepared and haphazard introduction to interpreting and translating during my first Engineers Without Borders summer trip to El Salvador, I am glad to know that there is a theory and process to working on intercultural projects. While I found that learning about general cultural differences between the United States and Latin America was interesting, what I most appreciated about the Engineering Communication class are the concrete examples of strategies we can use to connect with our communities. After our class discussions and readings, I have been able to reflect on three specific realms of strategies that I think will be most applicable for our next trip to El Salvador: planned introductions, process descriptions, and meeting structure.

During our last trip, the extent of our planned introductions to the community consisted of us saying our names at the beginning of our first community-wide meeting. . . . I think that we could have gained the community's trust faster if we had planned contacts with the community before we left for El Salvador. To avoid taking too much time out of meetings when we are in El Salvador, I think a solution will be to have each team member write a short biography that can be put along with their picture on a poster. We can ask our local contact, Tamar, to put the poster up in either the primary school or up at the public washing stations so the community can have a chance to “meet” each team member on their own time. Since illiteracy is still high in rural El Salvador, we can also request that community leaders read the short biographies at the water board meetings or at the end of a church service.

Our last trip was mostly survey work with minimal help from the community. During our next trip we will construct the water system for the community. During our two weeks' visit we will have to construct the foundations for the two water tank sites as well as lay the distribution pipe through the community. This will require a lot of sweat equity labor from the community in order to complete the project on schedule. We must be prepared to explain the construction process to the volunteers. The first step in doing this is making sure that we understand how construction will be planned, and we started by making flowcharts at

our organization's last meeting. By having the process written out I can better think through how to explain it in Spanish, and I will also have time to look up any new vocabulary; our schedules will be tight in the village, so just taking time to think about how to explain the construction process to the community will spare me undue stress.

As I have mentioned, our team meeting strategies need to be re-thought. . . . Our last community meetings placed me as an interpreter between community members and the EWB team. As the meeting moderator. I have found that it is very difficult for me to translate and think independently at the same time. It would be best if one of the project leads actually runs the meeting. I also think that segregating the team from the community members will only reinforce our separation from them.

In the new setup I envision, most of the team members will sit scattered in the audience with the rest of the community, and I will stand at the front of the classroom with the project leads and several community leaders. The project leads will run the actual meeting by talking to me in English, in a voice that is audible to the audience and the EWB members, and I will then translate what he or she has said into Spanish. Of course, I will be able to prepare introductions and other explanations ahead of time so I will not have constantly turn to the project leads. With only the meeting-essential EWB members at the front of the classroom we can center the attention on them, and by keeping the leaders—our group and community—together we can hopefully keep better control over the meeting without stifling discussion.

While I believe I was able to pick up useful communications strategies in the field, this course was able to speed up the learning process. Because we have such a short time to do our work in El Salvador, it is important that we can make the most of it while still keeping the community's priorities in mind. Rice EWB is also responsible for keeping in contact with the community long after the original project is finished, so it is important that we are able to not only help the community in the short term, but to be able to forge a relationship that will allow the community to better help itself in the future. I hope that our future projects can incorporate the practices we have learned about, such as participatory rural analysis, so that future EWB members can also learn, before they leave the country, that there actually is a process to the chaos of working on rural development projects.

1.1.3.2 Jessie Gill: Meetings and Assumptions

Looking back over my description of the Oniel Stove and the way my team introduced the water distribution and purification systems, I wonder if it is culturally appropriate to tackle the issue of cost "head-on"? Should we allow the community to raise these questions? When we made our introductions we said that it would be an inexpensive system, but by whose standards? And, by stating costs up-front, will they perceive that we are judging them for not being able to pay? We decided in class that effective presentations 1) explain why we chose this system, 2) describe (briefly) the process and technique, 3) describe how it operates and must be maintained, and 4) address costs. I am not so sure that this is an appropriate method. How do we both begin and end the meetings on positive notes in a spirit of cooperation?

In presenting a system, it is important to simplify the system and first give an overview with few details. Seeing as how Nicaragua is very much a story-telling culture (although not as much as India), it would be interesting to describe the system in terms of a story. We could introduce ourselves and describe how we were part of the design process while taking other classes, spending time with our families and friends. We can talk about sketching designs out on a napkin or calling each other in the middle of the night when we realized that something just had to be changed or done. I think that this would humanize us more and make us partners in this process rather than experts. Even as we describe how a system functions, perhaps we should make fun of ourselves during this time. After all, we "gringos" don't always know how to mix concrete so well. . . .

1.1.3.3 Deepa Panchang: How to Change Our Meetings

. . . Asking the assembled community members to set ground rules for meeting etiquette is an excellent idea to ensure that things don't get out of hand and that the agenda is covered. Posting an agenda at the beginning is also a useful idea. Having children perform skits related to the project could also be fun

and interactive. Translation during meetings can also be tricky, and personally I think the best technique is to have a “translator’s assistant” who can understand what is going on and translate to the rest of the group, without the translator having to interrupt the conversation each time. However, I do recognize that these techniques all vary with community characteristics and different procedures may work for different communities. Having separate meetings for women and men can also be a good technique for accommodating the varying roles they take and to make up for any possible inequality in representation.

1.1.3.4 Alec Walker: “Meeting” in a Tavern to Negotiate a Ride from Huang Hua Cun

After four long days of trekking through jungle rice trails and half-finished dirt roads, I was exhausted, hungry, and sore. It had rained several times each day, so that my socks made squishy sounds as I walked and my toes had gotten used to their wrinkles. I arrived in Huang Hua Cun (in the People’s Republic of China) at 16:00, the last destination of my trek and the major trading post of all the surrounding villages. I was dazzled by sunlight reflecting on cement and by the sounds of people talking. I hadn’t spoken with anyone since the early morning, when I left the village where I had spent the night. My objective, I nervously remembered, was to find a ride to the major town about 25 kilometers north so that I could catch the last bus back to Jinghong at 19:00. I remembered the words of the Dai women I had met in a night market almost a week ago, “Ask in the restaurants,” they’d said, “The owners all have cars, or they know people with cars. Don’t pay more than 25 yuan.”

I only found one restaurant in the entire town, though I stumbled around the winding and steeply sloped road looking for more. I wanted to find a larger one, one with red lanterns hanging from a real awning, the one from my imagination, with a car out front. I had reached the end of the town. I walked back to the restaurant, a 16-square-foot wooden, three walled building with a few mismatched chairs and two tables. I walked in and stood nervously, looking in desperation for someone with a knowing, helpful expression on their face. There was one woman and about six men in the restaurant. The men were smoking, and they looked up at me from the table with narrowed, inquisitive eyes.

Starting with an Apology. I decided to start by apologizing for being so wet. This went well, as several of the men laughed and one asked me how long I’d been out in the rain. I didn’t have time to answer before another man stood up. “There’s no issue,” he said, standing up to offer me his faded sky-blue plastic chair, “this place gets wet all the time.” “We have a good roof in here, though” the other man who had spoken to me added proudly.”

Using indirection. I wanted to figure out who owned the restaurant, and I wasn’t sure which of the two speakers to try first. For some reason, I didn’t feel comfortable asking outright. I didn’t know the word for tin, so I commented on how the other villages I had been to didn’t have any of the same kind of roof. I meant it as a compliment, to express that the roof was a rare one and that its owner should be proud, but the room was silent. They all looked at me with strained expressions, as if having failed to understand. I set my backpack down on the chair and made a show of stretching my shoulders. This made them all laugh, and I felt I had once again diffused the awkwardness. Someone teased me, expressing surprise for my having used the chair for my bag and not myself.

An unexpected reaction. I still felt uncomfortable asking who owned the restaurant, so I mentioned the bus out of the major town and asked if anyone could give me a ride to it. The men’s expressions lost their humor, and a few swiveled their chairs back to the positions they had been in before my arrival. They seemed ready to ignore me and continue what they were doing before. One told me he had a motorcycle and would take me for 40 yuan, if the roads were not too muddy. I told him I had heard about car rides for 25 yuan. He told me I wouldn’t find that in the village. I told him I was going to go ask around the town. He seemed offended that I wanted to verify his word. I went all the same.

Asking directly. I asked several people. Most stopped for a minute and looked surprised, ignoring my bad Chinese. I had grown accustomed to this kind of reaction when walking through villages in Xishuangbanna, but I hadn’t ever been looking for anything urgent or even specific before. One man had a motorcycle under his house, and he told me that he wouldn’t take me because the roads were too wet. He finally offered his services for 100 yuan, and I left him for the restaurant.

Power interactions. The man in the restaurant who had offered me the ride had a mobile phone, which he was using when I entered. He saw me and nodded as one would nod to an old friend who needs to temporarily be ignored until the serious business at hand is completed. I smiled and stood there awkwardly under the gazes of the others. I felt embarrassed and guilty for having mistrusted the man on the phone, but I scolded myself for projecting ungrounded explanations for the attention I was getting and for being so quick to trust the man now. The man hung up, brought the phone away from his face to type something, and then made another call. He avoided my gaze. I assumed this was punishment, and my slight anger was checked by my helplessness.

Unexpected agreement. He only remained on the phone for a minute, and then he hung up and smiled at me. I started to apologize and he shushed me. I asked him if I could pay him part of the money when I got to the bus. He laughed, then abruptly stopped and said “I’m not going to take you.” I was shocked, then immediately angry with myself. “No, he’s going to take you.” I looked to where his finger pointed and saw a very large and strong bald man in an undershirt walking uphill toward the restaurant. The man with the mobile phone told me goodbye and then shooed me towards the door. By the time I realized that I was going to pay the driver and that the man with the phone was just a friend of his, it was too late to thank the man with the phone.

Afterword. I was confused by faulty information about what kind of ride business to expect in the town. I was unfamiliar with the local culture and my language abilities were not expert. I was balancing my haste against my budget and my desire to be polite, and all of this resulted in misunderstandings and communication failure that might have been avoidable otherwise. The best way to have achieved my objective while minimizing risk of offending anyone would have been to allow myself more time. I could have spent the night at another village that I passed less than a mile from along the way, and then I would have had a full afternoon to negotiate a ride to the bus. Alternatively, I could have paid a higher fee and spent the night in the town. This high fee would actually still not be more than a few dollars at most, and although it can be advantageous to adopt the local perception of money expenditure, sometimes it is best to use money to compensate for the disadvantages that come from being a new foreigner.

In summary, when you hold a meeting in an intercultural setting, differences in status, values, background, and education can foster quite different expectations and cause misunderstanding. To achieve mutual agreement, follow a process that separates four steps (the basis of the Harvard Negotiation Process as set out by Fisher, Ury, and Patton): find out people’s motivations or interests, invent options for mutual gains, choose objective criteria, and reach agreement. Tools like paraphrasing and indirect narratives may be helpful depending upon the culture. Remaining positive, respectful, and flexible or firm when necessary are keys to success.

1.1.3.5 END OF MODULE

END OF THE MODULE

1.2 Essentials of cross-cultural communication: Guide for American professionals.²

1.2.1 Essentials of cross-cultural communication: Guide for American professionals.

1.2.1.1 Chapter 1. Introduction: Basics of cross-cultural communication.

We see the world through a cultural lens. We observe and filter the sensory stimuli through learned cultural patterns. Because cultural values, attitudes, and behavior are the habitual responses of a group to its environment, the values, the attitudes, and their resulting behavior are often beneath consciousness. Our

²This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m36647/1.4/>>.

culture surrounds us, like the air we breathe. Our culture is like the mineral content of a municipal water supply, invisible and often unnoticed until someone points it out.

As Trompenaars (1998, p. 24) advised,

"Culture is beneath awareness, yet it forms the roots of action."

Because the habits of our culture are beneath awareness, and because we naturally tend to feel most comfortable acting in the patterns of our own culture, we tend to follow a consistent pattern of culturally determined responses even when immersed in a different cultural setting. That is why cross-cultural interaction sometimes results in cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Adler (2008, p. 19) has explained that culture is formed from *values, attitudes, and behavior*. In the cross-cultural setting we naturally respond according to the values, attitudes and behavioral norms of our own culture. Our counterparts naturally respond according to the values, attitudes and behavioral norms of their own culture.

If something goes wrong, if the cross-cultural transaction is not successful, it may happen that neither side considers a cultural explanation for the misunderstanding. It may be that each side simply concludes that *those people* are difficult to deal with. Or perhaps each concludes that the other is unprofessional and lacks common courtesy.

When interpersonal interactions go wrong within the cross-cultural setting, does the source of the trouble lie in personality or in culture? While it is often difficult to answer this question, a knowledge of cultural differences and how to manage them is an important tool in the professional kit, right next to techniques for coping with personality differences.

1.2.1.2 Definition of culture.

Let us first establish a definition of culture. What is culture, after all? Trompenaars (1998) posits that humans everywhere face an array of survival tasks, a common set of human dilemmas. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow (as cited in Straker, 2008) has provided one description of these common tasks, which he called a hierarchy of needs³. Humans everywhere need food, water, shelter, and safety. In Maslow's explanation, humans also need a sense of love and belonging, they need a sense of self worth, and they need to aspire to something greater than themselves, what Maslow called self actualization.

So if we accept that humans everywhere face the same core dilemmas, the same survival tasks, and that humans everywhere have the same needs, we can ask about the ways that humans solve these problems and meet these needs. Culture, according to Trompenaars (1998), can be defined as the way that distinct groups of people habitually go about meeting common human needs. Culture is the aggregate of preferences among most people in the group for one set of solutions over the range of possible solutions available to them.

Looked at from this perspective, we can see that people in Pakistan and people in the USA would have the same need for a sense of love and belonging. One norm for meeting this need in the USA is romantic love leading to marriage. A widespread norm for meeting this need in Pakistan⁴ is arranged marriage, leading to romantic love. In Pakistan for many couples, first comes marriage, then comes love.

It is the other way around in the USA.

In Kyrgyzstan⁵, up until recent times, the need for love and belonging was sometimes met by the practice of "bride kidnapping," a custom that would surely result in a prison sentence, not marriage, in the USA.

1.2.1.3 Cultural preferences.

Culture then, is *the way that distinct groups of people habitually go about meeting common human needs*. Everyone needs to eat, but some cultural groups prefer rice while others prefer bread.

More simply, culture is "the way we do things around here." Why in the USA do people prefer to measure in feet, inches, pounds, gallons and miles? The US military uses the metric system, science uses the metric system, and most of the world, outside the USA, uses the metric system. So why is it that the USA does not

³<http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/maslow.htm>

⁴http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2006/12/pakistan_this_i.html

⁵<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kyrgyzstan/>

use the metric system in commerce, in transportation, in construction? The answer seems to lie in culture, in "the

way we do things around here." We in the USA seem to *prefer* to measure in feet, inches, pounds, gallons and miles. We like it that way.

1.2.1.4 Focus on national culture.

The definition of culture provided here, *the way that distinct groups of people habitually go about meeting common human needs*, is meant to refer to regional or national groups, not to smaller groups or subcultures within nations. Indeed, subcultures within nations and the culture of organizations large and small is a topic with similarities to a discussion of national cultures, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this study.

1.2.1.5 Norms within a culture.

Working from our definition of culture, *the way that distinct groups of people habitually go about meeting common human needs*, it is important now to isolate the concept of norms within cultural group. To say that Japanese communication style is more indirect (Bjerke, 1998, p. 185), compared to the style in the USA, is to speak of norms that apply to most people much of the time, and *not to all individuals or all situations all of the time*. It is a starting point for the American business traveler to be weighed against experience. It is quite possible therefore that the American business traveler would encounter Japanese colleagues who were surprisingly blunt in communication style, but that would not be the norm.

To say that the style of nonverbal communication during business meetings in Mexico reflects closer personal distance between individuals, compared to the style in the USA, is to speak of norms that apply to most people much of the time, and not to all situations all of the time. It is the norm in Mexico that greetings involve a kiss and distance between two people in conversation is closer than it is in the USA, but that does not mean that all people act in this manner all of the time.

As Trompenaars (1998, p. 24) explained,

"People within a culture do not all have identical sets of artifacts, norms, values, and assumptions."

Adler (2008, p. 21) made a similar point:

"A cultural orientation describes the attitudes of most people most of the time, never of all the people all of the time."

1.2.1.6 Are cultural differences real?

If there is a lot of variation around a norm in one culture compared to another, is the attempt to describe cultural differences valid? We said earlier that people everywhere are in fact the same in the sense of basic human needs as described by Maslow. If the language of business is business, if the language of engineering is engineering, can we

not proceed therefore assuming similarity rather than assuming differences among cultures? Can we not assume that cultural differences are superficial and that once we get down to business, we can be ourselves because cultural differences will quickly disappear?

The answer for this study is no. The premise for this study is that cultural differences are real and they do affect the outcome of professional encounters in the cross-cultural setting. To arrive in an unfamiliar cultural setting without a knowledge of cultural differences and a readiness to cope with them is to arrive with a lower chance of favorable outcomes.

To act without awareness of differences among norms within a differing culture is to invite cross-cultural blunder. Differences among norms can include norms for the type of gift and whether a gift is customary, norms for the timing and mix of social chatter and serious business discussion, norms for the style and place of humor, norms for roles within a hierarchy, norms for timing, sequence, and punctuality, and norms for nonverbal communication, to name a few. The tourist typically has the luxury of isolation from the consequences of cross-cultural blunders, but the professional traveler has a lot more to lose, especially when

the traveler is trying to sell a product, negotiate a deal, or generally leave a favorable impression of the home organization.

1.2.1.7 Judging cultural differences.

Our own culture surrounds us, yet its influence on our values, attitudes, and behavior are quite often invisible to us. See the Trompenaars quote above. Our culture feels normal, like normal room temperature, a temperature that we would not notice at all unless someone changed the thermostat to make us too hot or too cold. Interaction with a different culture is like a change in temperature. Sometimes the cultural temperature is set at a level that may well seem incorrect, too warm or too cold. When this happens, we are not likely to say, "Oh, the temperature is now different." We are more likely to say, "It is too warm in here." Or, "It is too cold."

So it is when we encounter cultural differences. We typically do not notice the patterns of our own culture until we are confronted with a different pattern, and then we are likely to regard it as something wrong, something incorrect. We use our own culture as the standard, and rate the difference against that standard. The result is typically judgmental. We apply a standard such as the American emphasis on digital punctuality to a culture where such adherence to a schedule is not so highly prized, where the sense of time more easily allows spontaneity, where timing is more about sequence and doing the right thing at the right time. Both sides may judge the other as not having a proper sense of time. Each is keeping to its own sense of time which in its context seems proper, correct, propitious.

1.2.1.8 Barriers to effective cross-cultural communication.

The tendency to rate cultural differences as correct or incorrect, using our own cultural as a standard, is a habit that often impedes understanding and stands as a barrier to effective cross-cultural communication. Such judgments are often irrelevant when applied to a different cultural context.

In each context, the correct way to go about meeting life's needs has culturally specific norms. Whether it is correct to kiss, bow, or shake hands when greeting depends on the culture. To assume, following the greeting, that the American sense of first-name informality works anywhere is to invite misunderstanding between message sender and message recipient. The resulting misunderstanding stands as a barrier to effective cross-cultural communication.

To accept cultural differences as valid in their own context does not require universal approval of every exotic variation and it does not require changing one's own values. It would be a stretch for most Americans to accept bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan as making sense in any context. As a general principle, however, it is prudent to identify and recognize cultural differences while suspending judgment.

1.2.1.9 Can we rank cultures from primitive to advanced?

The tendency to approach a different culture with judgments about its sophistication, advancement, or espoused values is a natural response to the cross-cultural encounter. Unfortunately, our tendency to quickly appoint ourselves cultural judge stands as another barrier to effective cross-cultural communication.

It is natural that we would rank other cultures as primitive or advanced in their use of technology. The Stanley Kubrick classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* vividly shows us how tool use might have separated early hominids from anthropoid apes. Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists often rank cultures according to their economic development from hunter-gatherer to agricultural to industrial to advanced technological. In his fascinating book *Empire of the Summer Moon*, for example, Gwynne (2010, p. 27-32) described the Comanche as "Stone Age hunters" having:

"A remarkably simple culture. They had no agriculture and had never felled trees or woven baskets or made pottery or built houses."

Gwynne explained that,

"No true plains tribes fished or practiced agriculture before the horse, and none did so after the horse. . . They remained relatively primitive, warlike hunters."

Unfortunately, ranking cultures from primitive to advanced is not useful when we seek to communicate effectively across cultures. Ranking cultures from primitive to advanced is

a judgmental exercise that impedes effective cross-cultural communication. Why? First of all, a hasty assessment of technical sophistication, which may begin as soon as the traveler touches down in a foreign airport, readily establishes a superior to inferior relationship that quickly leads to ethnocentrism and parochialism.

Secondly, ranking cultures from primitive to advanced, using technological or economic advancement as the criteria, may block our opportunity to appreciate a culture at the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy, where social organization, history, art, spiritual beliefs and intellectual pursuits lie. Upon further investigation we may find that wealth and quality of life can be defined in a variety of ways beyond leading economic indicators or Internet access. Consider the Amish lifestyle in heartland America, for example, as a culture where quality of life is not measured by the same standards as we find in the mainstream surrounding culture.

Finally, the attempt to rank cultures inevitably shows the bias of the observer. As Adler (2008, p. 14) observed,

"People in all cultures are, to a certain extent, parochial."

In other words, we all tend to see our own way of life as best and we all tend to rank our home country as the best place to live. This is often true whether or not the home country would rank highly on a scale of economic or technological development. As noted above, there are other ways to rate quality of life apart from economic or technological development. Within the cross-cultural setting, it is useful to keep in mind that our counterparts love their home country just as we love ours. Americans are not the only people who see their own way of life as best and their own country as the greatest place to live.

Adler (2008, p. 136) provided an example of the sort of cross-cultural misunderstanding that can occur when we rank cultures according to technological advancement:

"Members of a team of engineers, for example, assumed in their American colleagues at more technological expertise than did their Moroccan colleagues simply because Morocco is less economically and technologically advanced than the United States."

This sort of faulty cause-effect conclusion -that we can reach conclusions about intelligence and education based on where a person is from- is a barrier to effective cross-cultural communication.

The same faulty logic applies to language use. When a foreign visitor speaks our language with a lot of errors and strong accent, we tend to subconsciously assume that the person is a little short on intelligence or at least poorly educated. Any of us who have spent time in Latin America with only basic Spanish, however, know well that language facility is not a function of intelligence, but rather a function of time, practice, opportunity, motivation, and so on. We are no less smart because of weak facility with

Spanish, and our education in other matters still holds, but we may appear to the local listener as a little slow, if our production of the second language is full of errors.

Related to our tendency to rank people on their ability to speak our language, we may also find ourselves ranking people on the extent to which we judge them to be *Americanized*. This too is a judgment that impedes effective cross-cultural communication. While it helps cross-cultural conversation when a foreign counterpart knows something about our music, art, sports, and news, we can severely limit our opportunities for successful outcomes if we focus our attention primarily on those whom we deem to be more *Americanized*. Some people, after all, do not especially want to become *Americanized* for various reasons, just as an American who has lived for years in Japan might not want to seem too foreign, too Japanese, when coming back home to the USA.

Our willingness to avoid ranking cultures from primitive to advanced is especially significant for Americans as we enter the new economy of the 21st century. At least since World War II, Americans have become accustomed to a view of the USA as leading the world economically and technologically. That leadership may not be so prominent in various sectors in coming decades, and American travelers may at times find themselves on the short end of a technological or economic ranking.

1.2.1.10 Strategy for cross-cultural communication.

An effective strategy for cross-cultural communication is to suspend judgment. Observe, keep an open mind, and avoid the tendency to judge. Those of us raised within mainstream US culture may consider it irrelevant, if not unreasonably superstitious, that a Chinese real-estate client would avoid houses with the number 4 in the address, or houses with a U-shaped floor plan. But we do well to suspend judgment of the client's interest in *feng shui* (Bjerke, 1999, p. 162-163), take the information at face value, and use it to help the client find a suitable house.

Returning to the analogy of room temperature, it is usually more effective to say that the temperature is now different than to say, "It is too warm in here." Or, "It is too cold." It is more effective to say that the British drive on the left side of the road than to say that the British drive on the wrong side.

1.2.1.11 Discussion topics - Exercise

1. Adler (2008) has explained that culture is formed from values, attitudes, and behavior. Visit the Web site of a PBS program about arranged marriage in Pakistan⁶. Read background information and watch the video.

Discuss:

Compare and contrast romantic love leading to marriage as a norm in the USA with arranged marriage in Pakistan. If we assume that the human need for love is the same in both the USA and Pakistan, what differences in values, attitudes and behavior would lead to such very different ways of meeting the human need for love in Pakistan compared to the norm in the USA?

2. Visit the Web sites of McDonald's India⁷, McDonald's Japan⁸, and McDonald's USA⁹. Discuss:

What are notable differences in the information presented, the food and amenities that are highlighted, the use of color and graphic elements, and other techniques to attract customers? What has McDonald's assumed about attitudes of customers? How do those assumptions differ for McDonald's India or McDonald's Japan compared to McDonald's USA?

1.2.1.12 References:

Adler, N.J. (2008). *International dimensions of organizational behavior* (5th Ed.). Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing.

Bjerke, B. (1999). *Business leadership and culture: National management styles in the global economy*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Gwynne, S.C. (2010). *Empire of the summer moon: Quanah Parker and the rise and fall of the Comanches, the most powerful Indian tribe in American history*. New York: Scribner.

Kubrick, S. P. (Producer & Director). (1968). *2001: A Space odyssey* [Motion picture]. United States: MGM.

Straker, D. (2008). Maslow's hierarchy. *Changingminds.org*. Retrieved from <http://changingminds.org/explanations/needs/maslow.htm>

Trompenaars, F. (1998). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

1.3 Basics of Negotiating¹⁰

This PowerPoint file of 10 slides outlines a four-step process for successful negotiation. Teams will learn to

- Discover participants' reasons or interests

⁶http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2006/12/pakistan_this_i.html

⁷<http://www.mcdonaldsindia.com/>

⁸<http://www.mcdonalds.co.jp/>

⁹<http://www.mcdonalds.com/>

¹⁰This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m16047/1.1/>>.

- Invent options for mutual gain
- Choose objective criteria
- Reach agreement (or not)

From preparation and preliminaries to formulating a **Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement** (or BATNA), teams will learn what to bring to the negotiating table, how to listen actively and participate constructively while there, and what to do when negotiations don't go as planned.

This is an unsupported media type. To view, please see
[http://cnx.org/content/m16047/latest/NegotiationBasics\(66\).mov](http://cnx.org/content/m16047/latest/NegotiationBasics(66).mov)

Figure 1.1: Basics of Negotiating:Based on the Harvard Negotiation Project Principles

Download Version: Basics of Negotiating

This is an unsupported media type. To view, please see
<http://cnx.org/content/m16047/latest/NegotiationBasics.ppt>

Figure 1.2: Please click on the above link to download the PPT file

1.4 Group or Team Communication Resources¹¹

Many university courses require team presentations and collaborative reports. The materials listed below offer brief but salient advice on how to succeed with such assignments.

- Collaboration and Learning: Managing Groups¹²
- Group Leader Handbook¹³
- Guide for Team Presentations (Civil and Environmental Engineering)¹⁴
- Guide to Interpersonal Communication (Civil Engineering) (Section 1.6)
- Basics of Negotiating: Based on the Harvard Negotiation Project Principles (Section 1.3)
- Managing Conflict in Teams: Switching to Successful Negotiation (Section 1.5)
- Sample Chemical Engineering Student Team PowerPoint for Analysis¹⁵

¹¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m17248/1.2/>>.

¹²"Collaboration and Learning: Managing Groups" <<http://cnx.org/content/m16597/latest/>>

¹³"Group Leader Handbook" <<http://cnx.org/content/m15920/latest/>>

¹⁴"Guide for Team Presentations (Course: Principles of Environmental Engineering)"

<<http://cnx.org/content/m15942/latest/>>

¹⁵"Sample Chemical Engineering Student Team PowerPoint for Analysis" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17121/latest/>>

- The Business Climate for Engineering Communication¹⁶

You may also wish to consult more general resources on communication:

- Speaking and Oral Presentations Resources¹⁷
- Writing Resources¹⁸
- Visual Design, Poster, and PowerPoint Resources¹⁹

You may possibly wish to search for

- Discipline- or Field-Specific Undergraduate Course Communication Resources²⁰
- Discipline- or Field-Specific Graduate Course Communication Resources²¹
- Communication Evaluation and Planning Forms²²
- Communication Teaching Resources: Assignments and Materials to Use in Class²³
- Communication Teaching Resources: Integrating Communication Instruction into Courses²⁴
- Communication Teaching Resources: Training Materials for Student Communication Mentors, Coaches, and Discussion Leaders²⁵
- Resources for Professional Development and Communication²⁶
- Resources on Thesis and Dissertation Preparation for Graduate Students²⁷

The preparation of these materials was funded through a generous grant from the Gordon and Mary Cain Foundation.

1.5 Managing Conflict in Teams: Switching to Successful Negotiation²⁸

1.5.1 Styles of Conflict Behavior

Use this resource to understand communication strategies for managing conflict.

Whenever you work on a team, team members may disagree. To move from those conflicts to resolution and successful teamwork, you first need to be able to recognize various styles of conflict behavior and adopt communication strategies to transform conflict into successful negotiation. The four steps in negotiation reduce internal conflicts so that the team can meet its goals.

In team disagreements, some members may act more assertively than others, while some may be more cooperative than others. Figure 1's two-dimensional grid shows five styles of conflict behavior that combine cooperation and assertiveness in different degrees. For instance, a **competitive** style is highly assertive but

¹⁶"The Business Climate for Engineering Communication" <<http://cnx.org/content/m16032/latest/>>

¹⁷"Speaking and Oral Presentations Resources" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17252/latest/>>

¹⁸"Writing Resources" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17253/latest/>>

¹⁹"Visual Design, Poster, and PowerPoint Resources" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17250/latest/>>

²⁰"Discipline- or Field-Specific Undergraduate Course Communication Resources" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17242/latest/>>

²¹"Discipline- or Field-Specific Graduate Course Communication Resources" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17246/latest/>>

²²"Communication Evaluation and Planning Forms" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17247/latest/>>

²³"Communication Teaching Resources: Assignments and Materials to Use in Class" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17243/latest/>>

²⁴"Communication Teaching Resources: Integrating Communication Instruction into Course Design" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17245/latest/>>

²⁵"Communication Teaching Resources: Training Materials for Student Communication Mentors, Coaches, and Discussion Leaders" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17244/latest/>>

²⁶"Professional Development Materials in Communication for Graduate Students" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17249/latest/>>

²⁷"Dissertation and Thesis Related Communication Materials for Graduate Students" <<http://cnx.org/content/m17241/latest/>>

²⁸This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m15934/1.3/>>.

uncooperative; a **collaborative** style is both highly cooperative and assertive. Compromise misses the best of both cooperation and assertiveness.

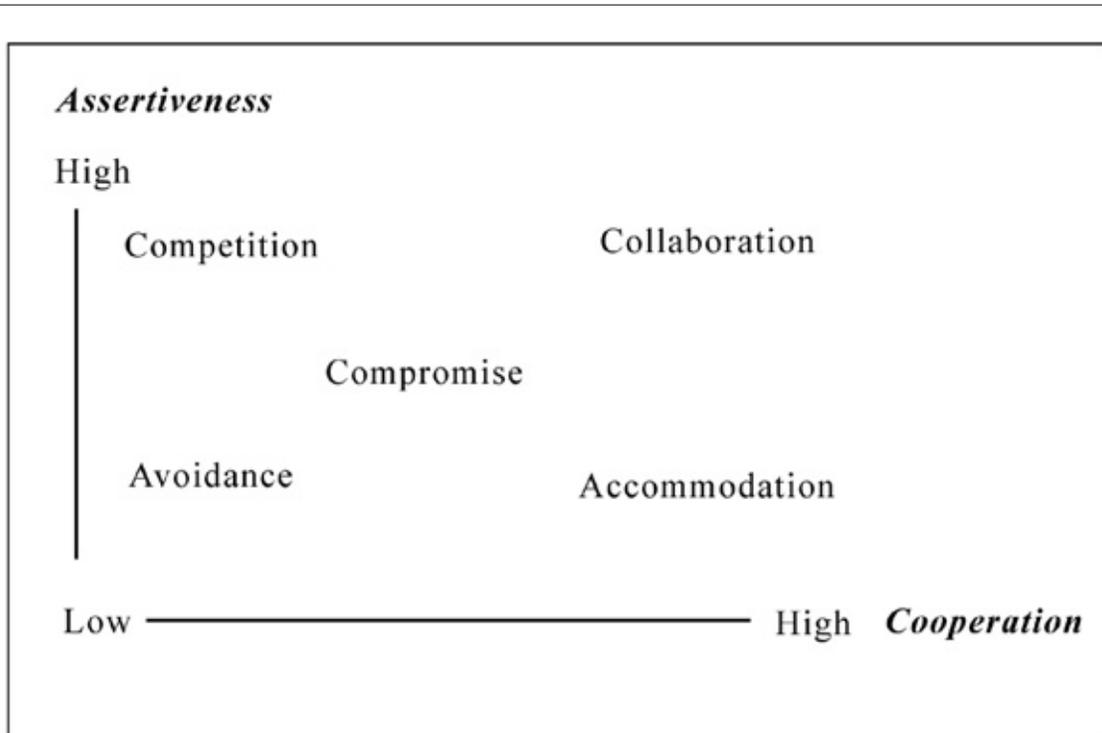


Figure 1.3: This grid demonstrates how varying degrees of cooperation and assertiveness combine in styles of conflict behavior.

1.5.2 Communication Processes to Cope with Diverse Conflict Styles

Once you identify the behavior styles of your fellow team members, you can modify your own conflict resolution style. If your team uses the following communication strategies, you will be able to resolve conflicts and achieve results that benefit most if not all members.

1.5.2.1 Listening actively

Listening actively to the other person's point of view can help you judge how assertive and cooperative another person is. Active listening strategies include asking clarification questions, paraphrasing the other person's statements to check the accuracy of your understanding, as well as acknowledging that person's feelings and encouraging him or her to keep expressing them.

By carefully listening to the other person's language, you can judge whether the person seems to lack assertiveness and is avoiding a direct expression of the problem. Draw such people out by asking for elaboration and clarification. On the other hand, if the person's speech is competitive (not cooperative but highly assertive), you can challenge that person to suggest some ways of accomplishing others' goals as well as his or her own. In addition, by using the method described on the next pages, you can uncover the other participants' perspectives and identify their needs and interests.

1.5.2.2 Noticing nonverbal signals

Active listening involves paying attention to verbal cues. However, in face-to-face confrontations, participants express themselves without words as well. If you notice these nonverbal signals while you listen actively, you can increase your understanding of the other person's assertiveness and cooperativeness. The other person's facial expressions, gestures, body posture, voice pitch, speech rate, and voice volume manifest intensity of emotion and feelings. Also, speakers should be aware of their own nonverbal signals. They should avoid defensive (uncooperative) signals and convey openness and supportiveness instead.

1.5.2.3 Imagining with empathy

Empathy is the ability to "put oneself in other people's shoes." Imagining how it would feel to be in another person's situation can help participants figure out others' reasons for being uncooperative or withdrawn. Empathy can also help participants imagine solutions to the conflict that might be mutually beneficial.

1.5.2.4 Choose words and manner carefully

How a person says something is vital. Drawing on active listening, attentiveness to nonverbal signals, and empathy, team members can imagine how others might react to a statement. This awareness will help them craft their language to avoid intensifying the conflict. Members can monitor what they say and strive to express their points without reducing the others' cooperativeness or willingness to continue talking.

1.5.2.5 Using "I-messages"

In a conflict, participants become less cooperative when they believe they are being blamed or criticized. Perceived criticism can cause shy persons to avoid further interaction. I-messages are statements that tell how **the speaker** feels or **how the speaker** perceives a situation without suggesting others have done so. Compare these messages:

"Your performance on the request for qualifications presentation was really poor."

"Everybody thought that you did very poorly on the presentation."

"I was disappointed by your presentation. I felt that you could have made a stronger point at the end."

The first two comments do not identify who owns these feelings. The first comment accuses the presenter of having done a poor job but it does not identify who owns the feelings. The second statement similarly fails to identify clearly who owns those feelings and instead suggests that "everyone" does. The third comment is a good example of an I-message because it clearly identifies who feels this way ("I was disappointed").

1.5.2.6 Respecting others: No ad-hominem arguments

Ad-hominem ("against the person" in Latin) attacks are arguments directed at the integrity of an opponent rather than at the problem. To gain maximum cooperation, everyone needs to focus on mutually beneficial solutions. Stay away from name-calling and focus on the issue at hand instead. Remember that personal attacks create resentment and are difficult to take back.

1.5.3 Four steps for resolving conflict: Principled negotiation

(adapted from Fisher & Ury, *Getting to YES*, 1983 - [click here](#) ²⁹for a summary).

Principled negotiation ideally results in resolutions that all can support. It encourages people to express their needs in an ethical, calm manner.

²⁹"Summary of Notes on the Harvard Negotiation Process" <<http://cnx.org/content/m15953/latest/>>

1.5.3.1 Differentiate between the problem and the people involved

Fisher and Ury call this step “separating people from the problem.” Use empathetic understanding and active listening to understand why the other party has taken a particular position. (A “position” is a claim or recommendation, such as “We should use styrofoam for the struts.” Or “We should make the struts out of aluminum.”) What are the features or dimensions of the problem that results from competing positions?

1.5.3.2 Focus on interests, not positions

Every position rests on an underlying need or interest. To find the best solution, not one that depends on someone’s “caving in” or “getting a part” of what was wanted, participants must identify the interests or needs at the heart of each position. Empathetic understanding may again be necessary in order to understand why another person advocates a certain position. Consider the following statements:

“We should use PowerPoint for our presentation.”

“We should use a presentation board for our presentation.”

Both statements reveal positions without revealing the reason or belief behind them. The first position could stem from the person’s desire to showcase his or her technology skills, while the second could stem from a distrust of technology or a concern that the computer in the presentation room might not work. Knowing the underlying reasons allows a team to find solutions capable of meeting all concerns. For example, the team could assign the most experienced PowerPoint users to prepare the first version of the visual aids as well as reserve a backup laptop and projector to take to the presentation. (Another solution might be to print overheads for transparency projection if computer projection fails or is unavailable.)

1.5.3.3 Invent options for mutual gain

The previous example shows how focusing on interests allows the group to develop creative solutions that reconcile everyone’s needs. Once the group has identified the interests underlying each position, it should brainstorm for solutions that exceed the original positions and benefit all sides. Be sure not to criticize solutions while the team is generating possibilities; delay decision-making until later.

1.5.3.4 Apply objective criteria

Choose criteria that everyone agrees are fair and unbiased. In the preceding case, those criteria could be “benefiting from the highest level of skills the team can display” and “overcoming technology limitations.” Once chosen, each option should be ranked according to the criteria. If others will not agree to the highest-ranked option, talk with the instructor for guidance.

1.5.4 External Resources

NOAA Tutorial on managing conflict in a collaborative process

http://www.csc.noaa.gov/cmfp/process/meeting_1.htm³⁰ (Accessed November 7, 2007)

1.6 Guide to Interpersonal Communication (Civil Engineering)³¹

As a professional civil engineer, you will be expected to negotiate a variety of interpersonal communications. Civil engineers frequently work in teams that include a diverse collection of professionals: other civil engineers, lawyers, environmental experts, city planners, and interested community members. These team members have different levels of expertise and different perspectives on a project. A good civil engineer will develop a range of listening and presentation strategies to communicate vital engineering issues and move

³⁰http://www.csc.noaa.gov/cmfp/process/meeting_1.htm

³¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m17115/1.1/>>.

the team toward its objective. This resource describes some of the most essential interpersonal skills in team situations (adapted from Joseph Devito).

1.6.1 Assess and Adapt

1.6.1.1 Be mindful

In every communication situation, you should assess the role of the participants, the outcomes desired, and the communication options available to you, such as meetings, e-mail or phone calls, letters, memos, and so on. Carefully determine the best course of action to keep the team on task. For example, a brainstorming session may draw out many good ideas if contributors are of similar rank and are open to hearing from others, but meeting with individuals separately may make some lower-ranking people unwilling to speak out to you if high-ranking members tend to be judgmental when they don't immediately agree.

1.6.1.2 Be flexible

Communication situations change constantly, potentially thwarting efforts to keep communication between and among teams consistent. A trusted member of a team may be temporarily; new directives may arrive from management; e-mail may be down; new members may be added to the team; an immediate deadline may be imposed, and so on. Because influential variables are in flux, strategies that might have been appropriate in one situation may be ineffective in another. Good communicators must learn to adapt messages to each unique communication situation rather than relying on the same messages or message types each time. You can become more flexible by regularly evaluating what is different about new situations and by remembering that new contexts may require unique messages or message strategies.

1.6.1.3 Be culturally sensitive

Because civil engineering projects frequently span national boundaries, young engineers must expect that they will be entering into relationships with people from different cultures. Cultural sensitivity refers to a person's awareness and acknowledgement of cultural differences. When working with multicultural teams, make the effort to learn what different cultures consider appropriate or effective behavior. For instance, while eye-contact is highly valued in Western cultures, it may be considered rude between persons of different ranks in some Asian cultures.

You can learn about cultural expectations in interpersonal interactions by reading about the cultures of members or clients or simply by talking to members of your team. Be open to differences and show your genuine interest in learning; don't try to evaluate these differences from your cultural point of view. Differences are just that; there is nothing inherently good or bad about them. Rather, they represent a different way of looking at and doing things. In general, it is the client's culture that determines, how group members adapt to and interact with each other. For example, if the client considers introductory summaries presumptuous or high-handed because introductory summaries give the conclusion before the evidence, you may decide to send the summary only with copies intended for your north American or European company internally, not to the client.

1.6.2 Tips for engaging in dialogue

1.6.2.1 Be open and empathetic

An open communication strategy requires empathy—offering openness of communication and listening in return to openness with you. Empathy refers to the ability to put oneself in another person's place. You can express empathy and invite openness in a conversation by maintaining eye-contact (providing the listener's culture permits it), looking attentive, and remaining near the person with whom you are speaking. Using team members' names can also help you establish empathy and trust. Use the level of formality in addressing

the other person that his or her culture expects. Some cultures consider using first names rude, although using the first names of even complete strangers is common in the US.

In addition, consider the impact of listening attentively rather than speaking. Sometimes, listening well achieves more in a relationship than words. You also can begin your response by summarizing what you believe the other speaker has said before making your own point. This pattern of turn-taking enables the other person to confirm that you understood correctly and shows respect for the other person's point of view.

1.6.2.2 Use I-messages

When interacting with a team member, use I-messages to take ownership of your thoughts and feelings. I-messages (for example, saying "I was confused" rather than "you were unclear") clarify that the information you are presenting belongs to you, based on your feelings and perceptions. This clarity diffuses tension and criticism, enabling the recipient of the information to act on it.

Compare the following messages:

- Your performance on the request for qualifications presentation was really poor.
- Everyone in the group thought that you did very poorly on the presentation.
- I was really disappointed by your presentation. I felt that you could have made a stronger point at the end.

The first two comments do not identify who owns these feelings. The first comment simply accuses the presenter of having done a poor job without providing any context for the accusation. The second statement identifies a vague "everyone" as the source of accusation. The last statement is an example of an I-message because it clearly identifies the speaker, and thus a specific individual that can be queried or confronted, as the one with the opinion ("I was really disappointed").

1.6.2.3 Use meta-messages

Meta-messages are messages that underlie the words spoken. They can affect how your message is received. Meta-messages can be communicated verbally or nonverbally. A question such as "Did you get that?" or "Does that make sense?" is a verbal meta-message. It's a comment about the message you just sent. Similarly you can express meta-messages nonverbally. For instance, by putting your finger in front of your mouth while revealing a secret to another person, you send the nonverbal meta-message that this information is confidential.

You can increase your ability to meta-communicate by paraphrasing messages and communicating the feelings that go along with your message. You can also employ expressiveness to aid in understanding. By varying your voice rate, volume, and pitch, you can help listeners understand particularly important points or gauge yourself whether your audience is paying adequate attention. Remember, as well, that gestures and facial expressions are important meta-cues that can affect how your message is received. These meta-messages are also dependent on cultural context. Be careful that your signals are not misread, and that you do not misread others' actions. For example, some Indian nationals use a side-to-side head rotation to signal agreement, the very signal that in the West suggests disapproval or disagreement.

1.6.2.4 Be positive

Aim for a positive tone in your communications, making an effort to replace negative messages with positive ones. For instance, instead of saying "Your solution is stupid," you might consider an alternative such as "I think the option we discussed earlier would address our problem more effectively." Try always to make your counterproposal proactive and voice suggestions as improvements, rather than replacements, for ideas.

1.6.2.5 Manage your interactions

Communication requires give and take. In a diverse team environment, success requires open communication, trust, and compromise. Interaction management refers to the strategies used to regulate the flow of

communication in interpersonal interactions. As a speaker, you can regulate interactions by using appropriate cues to signal conversational turns. For instance, you may signal your willingness to pass a turn to the listener by dropping the intonation at the end of your sentence, or by keeping silent. As a listener, you can signal a turn request by using a gesture (such as raising your hand) or by opening your mouth.

Remember, oral communication is irreversible, even though it is fleeting. Once you say something, you can't easily take it back if the listener is offended. Saying "I'm sorry" may reduce the insult, but the effects are lasting. The same is true for emotionally satisfying and pleasing remarks. So make sure you apply these principles to increase the effectiveness of your interpersonal messages.

1.7 Guide to Interpersonal Communication³²

As new advances in engineering have occurred in the past quarter century, new ethical issues have arisen, as we frequently see in health care technology. The health care industry can now keep many people alive for a longer period of time, and people who would have died twenty[U+2011]five years ago can now be treated. Premature infants, heart attack victims, and other individuals can now be treated with new devices that prolong life. But new possibilities also raise ethical questions about who should receive benefits, who should pay for them, and when is it ethical to prolong life. Should a person who is being kept alive on by a machine and who has no chance of being returned to a state of health be permitted to die? At what birth weight should a premature infant be treated with unusually expensive equipment? Learning how to deal with ethical issues will be an important part of your engineering career. This summary can only touch the surface of the issues that lie ahead.

Reasons for ethical decisions include

- avoiding harm (something that includes both intentions and effects of actions)
- following ideals or standards
- and acknowledging the rights of stakeholders in a situation.

As engineers in the Ford Pinto case years ago discovered, avoiding harm must come before profit and other motives. Ideals address our highest conception of human behavior, such as compassionate sensitivity to others' needs. The ideal standards for ethical behavior are both personal and private choices, because an individual's ideals are in some senses his or her own choice, but engineering specialties also agree to follow specific codes of ethical practice, which commit each engineer to standards approved by all other engineers.

Some situations contain a **dilemma**, a problem to which all solutions are bad in one way or another. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning suggests six primary levels of moral reasoning that people learn sequentially as they grow up. Although a mature person may at times use different levels of reasoning, he or she will typically tend to argue at one level.

³²This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m17129/1.1/>>.

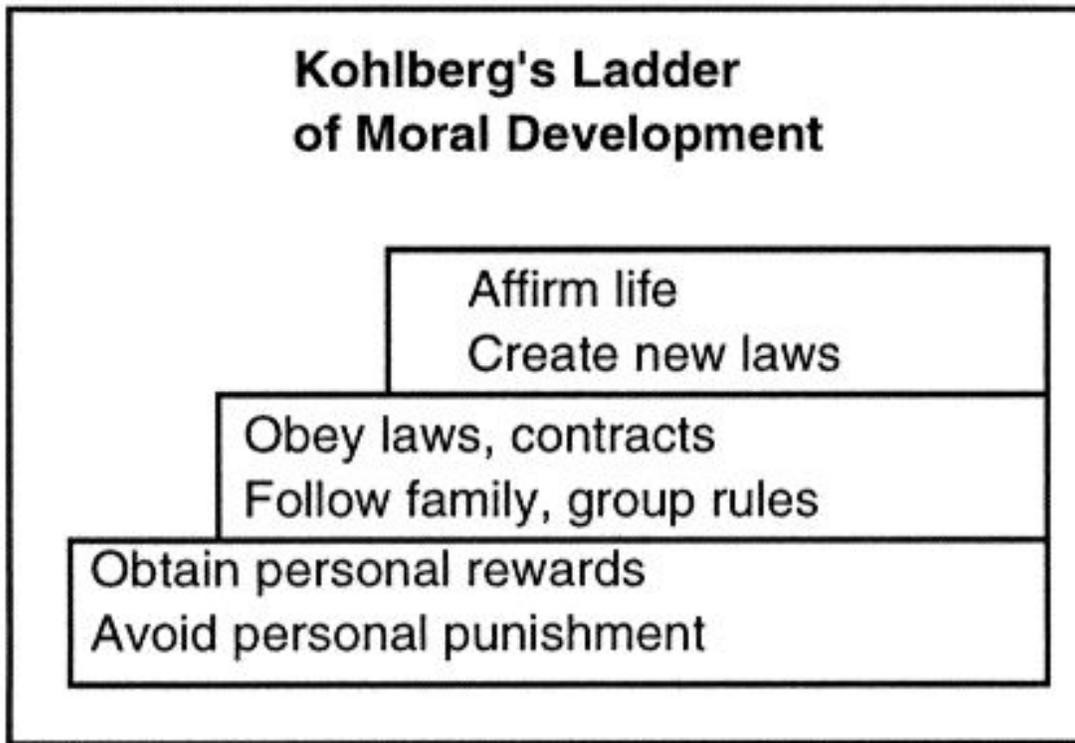


Figure 1.4: Lawrence Kohlberg's Ladder for Moral Development

In the lowest two levels, a person is concerned principally about his or her own welfare. In levels one and two the person makes choices either to obtain rewards or to avoid harm.

For example, a young child may agree to behave in order to obtain a cookie or to avoid a spanking. In the next levels, three and four, the influence of a group is dominant. The older child is taught the rules of his or her family and the codes of small organizations such as a scout troop or school team. During the high school years, the laws of state and nation are learned and decisions are often based on contractual or legal requirements. Because an individual is guaranteed certain rights by the Constitution and by other legislation and ordinances, and because laws may create certain obligations or duties, the third and fourth stages of moral reasoning are called rule-governed.

The fifth and sixth levels are law creating levels. At the fifth level, new laws may be enacted to deal with new ethical problems, such as who can receive new and controversial treatments or who may have access to a new weapons technology. And at the sixth level, the concerns of many countries and peoples, the environment, and the future of the planet may be the top priority. So as one moves up the ladder, the reasoning is based on first, self-interest, then group interests, and finally, global interests. As you analyze specific cases, look for the levels of reasoning various participants choose.

Some of the ethical considerations embodied in different theories of ethical behavior include the **intent** of the person committing the action; the **consequences** of the action; and the ideal or standard prescribed by a group. Theories concerned with intent may judge an action ethical if the person did not intend harm to those affected. This theory would say that if an engineer intended to benefit the client, accidental side effects or bad outcomes are not the engineer's fault. Similarly, Shakespeare's Henry V tells a soldier that the

king is not responsible for a soldier's death in battle since in ordering them to fight, the king intends a good result and "purposes not their deaths." The soldier listening to the king argues from a different theory, one that judges ethical responsibility by **results**: if the outcome is bad, the deed is bad. Other theories weigh the agent's level of knowledge, saying that a person who knows more knowledge has a greater obligation than one who acts in ignorance. Acting against the knowledge that one should have had constitutes negligence.

All individuals, regardless of profession, are supposed to honor general human rights, those that individuals have by virtue of being born, such as the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And each individual has certain duties, such as to fulfill contracts, to avoid lying, stealing, and cheating, and to avoid harm to others. Other rights people have by virtue of a protected status, such as being handicapped. Balancing rights and duties, pursuing ideals, and discovering the best use of engineering methods and resources will be an ethical challenge in your career.

All situations involve stakeholders [U+2011] [U+2011] people who have an interest in how the situation turns out. Stakeholders include third [U+2011] party payers (insurance companies), customers, vendors, hospitals, employees' families, employers, the media (newspapers, TV, and so on), the government, and other engineering professionals. Whose will should dominate in a decision: the insurance company's, the regulator's, the engineering company's, or the client's? The presence of many stakeholders complicates ethical decisions. All the people involved in a technology have a stake in who has access to it, who benefits by it, who controls it, and who pays for it.

When the nature of a hazard is ambiguous, engineers have to balance complex interests of many stakeholders. Learning more about ethics as you continue through your training as an engineer will greatly help you in communicating successfully with your clients, with other colleagues, and with politicians and the general public.

1.8 Presenting to Managers and Other Professionals³³

This PPT slide show explains differences between academic and professional audiences, details some of the purposes and challenges of professional situations, and recommends ways of organizing talks and designing PowerPoint slides to deliver points concisely and convincingly.

This is an unsupported media type. To view, please see
<http://cnx.org/content/m17117/latest/PresentToProfessionals.mov>

Figure 1.5: Presenting to Managers and Other Professionals

³³This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m17117/1.2/>>.

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<http://cnx.org/content/m17117/latest/PresentToProfessionals.ppt>

Figure 1.6: Please click on the above link to download the PPT file

1.9 Guide to Communication and Corporate Culture³⁴

1.9.1 What is corporate culture?

When you interact with clients or when you seek a job, pay attention to the organization's corporate culture. Corporate culture refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and values that the company's members share and to the behaviors consistent with them (/that they give rise to). Corporate culture sets one organization apart from another. Corporate culture dictates how members of the organization will see you, interact with you, and sometimes judge you.

Some aspects of corporate culture are easily observed; others are more difficult to discern. You can easily observe the office environment and how people dress and speak. In one company individuals work separately in closed offices; in others teams may work in shared environments. The more subtle components of corporate culture, such as its values and overarching business philosophy, may not be readily apparent, but they are reflected in the behaviors of the organization's members and in the symbols it uses. The following explanation briefly describes four types of corporate culture that you may notice in job interviews or business meetings.

1.9.2 Four types of corporate culture

In Corporate Cultures, First Name Deal and First Name Kennedy propose that the nature of a company's mission usually determines how two elements combine in the firm's typical transactions. The character of this combination strongly affects the type of culture the company evolves and acts upon. These two elements are 1) **the proportion of resources (principally money or people) committed to typical projects** and 2) **the length of time required for results to be known** (feedback time). Different combinations of these two factors produced four types of corporate cultures: 1) the bet-your-company-culture; 2) the macho or tough-guy culture; 3) the work hard/play hard culture, and 4) the process or bureaucratic culture. These types of culture also affect how individuals communicate and the communication features that are preferred or expected within the corporate/company environment. As an engineer acting as a consultant or employee, you can anticipate the need to adapt your communication style to these various environments.

- **Bet-your-company culture.** Bet-your-company culture is common among industries in which long-term projects require a high proportion of company resources, such as research and development or resource development costs. Examples include mining companies and real estate developers. Big projects are viewed seriously. Proposals for these projects are often lengthy and contain extensive analyses and appendices that will be reviewed by different types of experts. These companies follow

³⁴This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m17116/1.1/>>.

written agendas and communicate formally and seriously. Presentations are formal and “no nonsense.” Documents often have many appendices to back up recommendations.

- **Macho or tough-guy culture.** Macho or tough-guy culture is common in deals that involve big projects with relatively short-term feedback horizons. These projects usually depend on much shorter working documents plus long technical documents. Some property transactions may be done on a handshake followed up by legal contracts written by lawyers. Some communication events in this culture are dramatic (press conferences, bonus signings, and product introductions) while others are formal and not public. Civil and environmental engineers seldom work in these environments, which are more common in fields such as entertainment.
- **Work hard/play hard culture.** Work hard/play hard cultures emphasize meeting short-term deadlines, require high energy and lots of client contact, and usually involve only a fraction of the company’s resources in any one deal. Selling is usually the dominant activity of such firms. Success depends on the number of contacts made. Civil and environmental engineers are usually not part of this kind of firm, although some consulting firms provide short-term services where immediate deadlines, such as proposal submission deadlines or government applications, require rapid turnaround times. Such companies prefer to hire consulting firms that have a “can do” attitude and efficient processes. Keep such clients updated frequently, usually with e-mail.
- **Process or bureaucratic culture.** Bureaucratic cultures are common at all levels of government and among some big service companies such as hospitals, insurance agencies, and universities. Process cultures rely on forms, ritualistic formal reports, proposals, and policy statements. Many memos are written “to the file” as a kind of insurance policy in case a complaint is ever received. Since performance is judged by adherence to codes and procedures, recognition for the fulfillment of duties or instances of accomplishment may only be precipitated by a challenge. Documents that highlight compliance with expected structures and information are valued. Civil and environmental engineers often work in these cultures and can gain added recognition by calling attention to full compliance in every situation. Recognition that an engineer can be trusted to “do it right” demonstrates eligibility for leadership roles and promotion.

1.9.3 Adapting communication to a client’s corporate culture

As these brief descriptions indicate, clients’ expectations may vary significantly depending upon what type of corporate culture dominates. Students should analyze the type of culture that characterizes a given client company. As mentioned above, the proportion of resources and the feedback time affect many aspects of communication.

Once the client’s corporate culture has been identified, a student should adapt to the frequency, formality, and type of communication that is customary in that culture. This adaptation will strongly affect the client’s satisfaction and attitude toward both the engineering company and the individual student. It is common in industry for clients to request specific individuals as project managers if those individuals have previously demonstrated an awareness of “how the client likes things done.” Whenever an engineer acts as the liaison or the new business development contact, the ability to recognize and adapt to corporate culture have an impact on success. The following page contains specific suggestions for analyzing and adapting to a prospective employer’s or client company’s culture.

1.9.4 Checklist for adapting communication to a new corporate culture:

- What audiences will make the decision in this corporation on this issue? Will your document have to go up through several layers to get approval? If so, what are the criteria and values that may affect acceptance there? For example, is being on schedule the most important consideration? Cost? Quality?
- What type of communication is preferred? Do they want lengthy documents (“bet your company” or “bureaucratic” culture)? Is “short and sweet” the typical standard?

- What medium of communication is preferred? What kind of medium is usually chosen for this type of situation? Check the files to see what others have done.
- What vocabulary and format are used? What colors and designs are used? At Hewlett-Packard (HP), all rectangles have curved corners, for example.

1.9.5 Evaluating corporate cultures while seeking employment

Graduating seniors seeking a job should thoroughly research companies' corporate cultures. The following questions can be used in evaluating opportunities.

- Do the values stated in the company's mission match your own?
- Do the stories employees tell you about the company seem like narratives in which you would like to be a featured character?
- What behaviors characterize those who are successful at this company?
- What achievements earn rewards and promotions at the company?
- What opportunities will you have to learn through training or rotating assignments?
- Will the work you do help you to advance in your job at this company or in other companies? Will you have a chance to observe valued activities?
- How would you describe employee morale? Are they hiring because other employees are finding more compatible work environments elsewhere?
- What attitudes are expressed toward diversity and equal opportunity? If people like you do not occupy the kinds of positions to which you aspire, do you think you will succeed?
- What kinds of relationships does the company have with its community? What kinds of events does it sponsor? What activities does the company participate in?

Seek a company in which you will be able to support the organization's values.

1.9.6 Adapting communication to types of corporate cultures

Consider the following tips for adapting your ordinary communication practices when you interact with people who work in the four types of corporate cultures Deal and Kennedy describe.

1.9.6.1 Bet-your-company culture.

In general, managers who work in a bet-your-company culture assume that if every small component of a project is well documented and thoroughly tested, the large project on which so much depends will succeed. That belief justifies preparing and expecting others to prepare well-supported arguments, no matter how small. Giving evidence of one's calculations, photocopies of sources, or appendices listing the articles you used in preparing a recommendation will generally not be amiss. You will be perceived as reliable, thorough, and trustworthy.

Second, mine files or management of change systems to explore how things are usually done. Following accepted patterns will convince others that you fit in, work as others work, and understand the system. See how others document their work or prepare information for others on the project. Follow the routine system of headings for routine communication. People will reward you for doing what is expected.

Use methods of communication and genres that your readers trust, or bring up problems with the method discretely to your manager. You might say, "I noticed that this is the way we've usually prepared this kind of report (showing your version A), but I wondered whether you might find this version more useful because it puts X in a more visible position, and it might be more convincing to have it there. Which one do you prefer?" Don't be surprised if A is chosen, even if the reader likes B. The conventions of a large, familiar system can be hard to change. Always argue on the basis of serving the purpose more effectively rather than on the basis of a flaw in the existing system.

Submit issues or questions to be put on the agenda well in advance so that the possibility can be discussed before the meeting occurs.

Argue in favor of your own points by linking them to values the organization endorses in its “values statement,” “quality control statements,” “vision for the new century,” and so on.

1.9.6.2 Work hard/play hard culture.

Since this culture fosters MANY transactions with short-term time horizons, expect many routine communications, time-saving modes such as e-mail and instant messaging, and pre-established forms (many of them on-line). Write short requests and proposals backed up with the essential information, not reams of data or analysis. Use “bottom-line” principles: put the main point early and the action request early. Unless the request is totally unorthodox and must be argued for in detail, use one-page memos and short e-mails. Expect short sentences in return: “I approve.” “Not really.” “Review at Sat. meeting.” Lots of your colleagues may be using Blackberries, and thumbing a long message is tiresome. Some symbols may replace words, too.

Replying promptly will earn favor. Check your e-mail often, and do it as soon as you hit the office (and perhaps after you return home as well). Not reading your messages will probably ruin your reputation or at least dent it. Responding promptly will be taken as evidence of your commitment to the group.

Expressions of commitment, eagerness to work, and dedication to customer or client services will probably be appreciated. Slang expressions, however, are not good because these will necessarily remain in the file for seven years or so (legal requirements), and later on the slang will look dated and out of touch. Long appendices and reports will not be appreciated.

1.9.6.3 Macho or tough-guy culture.

If you join a company in this group, such as a start-up entrepreneurial firm or an entertainment or public relations firm that engages in big deals, you will probably not be one of the big players at the beginning. You’ll probably be in the background preparing the support documents for projects, but if you are involved in the press conferences, negotiation meetings, or proposals for clients, remember that high levels of enthusiasm are expected in combination with concern for exact follow-through. Being on time or ahead of the “needed by” date with easy-to-use cover sheets that call attention to the key points or purposes of the attached documents will win credit/approval. Don’t overload people who have large responsibilities with lots of e-mails or requests, and be attentive to their needs as deals or projects progress.

1.9.6.4 Process or bureaucratic culture.

Find out what forms are used for which purposes. Sending even crucial information on the wrong form may cause it to be overlooked or ignored by those who see the communication as “not meant for them.” On-line forms and elaborate/standardized systems of documentation are characteristic of this culture. In a bureaucratic culture (think libraries, insurance companies, banks, and universities), it is sometimes more important to follow the right procedure than to have the right information or the right answer.

Make your paragraphs and answers easy to read, nonetheless. Bureaucratic institutions may be understaffed, and even though their employees like tremendous amounts of documentation, they are usually short of time and object to being overworked with long explanations. Adding a post-it note that says you followed all the steps in the policy manual, or adding a note to answer a question or support the quality of your information will probably win you a nod of appreciation.

