

# Cultural factors that affect business communication

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Various countries interact in business-related activities on a daily basis. However, these countries have different cultures. These differences in culture prove to be obstacles in business communication. Factors such as language, gestures, holidays and dress codes play a major role in business communication. It is important to understand various cultures when participating in business-related activities. Knowledge of cultural factors eliminates the common mistakes and misunderstandings associated with business communication between cultures.

**Purpose** The purpose of this report is to examine the cultural factors of various countries and how they affect business communication, and also to suggest ways to overcome the various communication barriers. Understanding cultural factors is vital when dealing with business communication. Differences between cultures must be respected in order to communicate clearly and effectively.

**Sources and Methods** In preparing this report, the cultural factors of various countries were analyzed in order to 1 determine how they affect business communication. The information is gathered from a variety of business journals and magazines.

**Report Organization** This report explores the challenges in cultural communication, examines the differences in cultures of various countries, and recommends steps to achieve multicultural collaboration.

**CULTURAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES** Communication varies between cultures. Factors such as language and gestures may have different meanings in different cultures. These factors make it difficult to communicate clearly. In the business world, communication is essential. It is important to understand the various differences in communication when dealing with different cultures.

**Culture and Business Communication** Culture

is a concept that encompasses many elements, but is simply defined as the customs or common experiences shared by a community or group. Cultures vary from country to country, and the differences in cultural values sometimes conflict. These differences can cause misunderstandings in communication.

Since communication is essential when dealing with business, it is important to understand the basic cultural values of other countries. Culture and business communication are closely related, as culture is one of the foundations of basic communication. Patterns of Cultural Communication Differences The ways in which the cultures of various countries differ from one another can be categorized into six patterns: differences in communication styles, attitudes towards conflict, completing tasks, decision-making styles, attitudes toward disclosure, and knowledge. The patterns describe common situations in communication between cultures.

- Different Communication Styles - People communicate through language, gestures, and facial expressions.

- Non-verbal communication can also include personal distance and seating arrangements.
- Different Attitudes Towards Conflict - When conflict arises, different cultures handle situations in different ways. Some cultures avoid conflict, while others deal with it directly.
- Different Ways of Completing Tasks - When working together on tasks, some cultures place more emphasis on teamwork than on actually completing the task, and some place less emphasis on teamwork, and more on the task at hand.
- Different Decision-Making Styles - Various cultures like to hold a consensus when 3

making a decision, and others may like to delegate the decision making responsibilities. · Different Attitudes Towards Disclosure - Many cultures prefer to keep emotions private when dealing with various conflicts, while others feel comfortable revealing information. · Different Ways of Acquiring Knowledge - Cultures acquire knowledge using different methods. Some prefer to learn through performing some type of research, or by other cognitive methods.

## BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

International trade between countries has increased over the years as Figure 1 depicts. FIGURE 1: U. S. Exposure to International Trade 1929-1997 4

Communication is an essential part of international trading. Therefore, it is important to know the cultural factors of countries when engaging in such business activities. Knowing the proper ways to interact with various cultures is essential, and it eliminates common mistakes and misunderstandings.

Japan Japan is one of the major countries involved in business activities around the world. In engage in any type of business-related activity, it would be best to have general knowledge of the Japanese language. Other cultural factors include holidays, attire, time, and gestures. During three weeks of the year (December 28 to January 3, April 29 to May 5, and mid August) many Japanese visit the graves of their ancestors. Making appointments or scheduling meetings during these times would be considered inappropriate. The attire should also be considered. Some Japanese homes and restaurants require that shoes be removed.

In Ryokan style restaurants, a Yucatan or a kimono robe is usually provided by the restaurant to be worn. The robe should be only wrapped left over right, as only the deceased wear a kimono wrapped right over left. When conducting a meeting, the Japanese feel that punctuality is key. Late comers are considered rude. The Japanese work week consists of 48 hours with no overtime. 5 During the first 15 minutes of any meeting or conversation, the Japanese consider it proper to be silent. The bow is the most important gesture in Japanese culture. Bows are used for expressing appreciation, making apologies, greetings and farewells. The depth of the bow is also important. When addressing an individual of a higher status, or when the rank of the individual is not known, the bow is low. When addressing an individual of equal rank, a bow at the same height of the other person is suitable. The Japanese consider pointing to be rude.

Instead, one should direct the hand towards the person indicated with the palm facing upward. The Japanese also consider direct eye contact as a sign of respect. When shaking hands, the Japanese use a gentle grip. Brazil Brazil is one of the world's largest countries and has a very diverse population. Many factors will affect the communication within such a large group of people. The many ethnic groups and nationalities that exist in Brazil, all with their own languages, dialects, customs and values, make communication difficult. Communication that take place as a result of business can become difficult to decipher without the proper research on the parties involved. Brazilians are friendly and enjoy socializing and meeting people from other countries. 6 Brazilian people are fast talkers and consider it rude to break

eye contact. Conversation is highly animated. When conversing, it is proper to stand close together and to touch often.

Brazilians consider themselves Americans, so using the phrase 'in America' may cause some confusion. In business practices, Brazilians prefer a slow pace. Good-natured small talk is needed before delving into business. Problems are solved according to subjective feelings rather than going by a set of rules or laws. The primary negotiator will take into consideration only the information that is relevant. Business culture is intensely hierarchical. Social class is a major influence in this society, and it often determines what type of job a person will have. When doing business with Brazilians, there must be an understanding that the business relationship will be long-term. It is considered rude to change the negotiating team, as this is a major breach of Brazilian business protocol. Business attire in Brazil is becoming more casual, but some may refuse to do business with persons dressed inappropriately.

In initial meetings with Brazilians, it is advisable to wear dress clothes. It is preferable for men to wear three-piece suits and for women to have an elegant appearance. Lightweight fabrics should be chosen for the sweltering summer. With so many languages and dialects, business communication can be potentially difficult. Barriers to communication, though, will mainly lie with the language differences. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of the various cultural factors that play a role in communication. Germany Germany is one of the most important countries involved in international trade. It is imperative to understand the cultural

factors of Germany when involved in business communication. Various cultural factors include language, management methods, and business relationships. Most Germans speak two languages, which are German and local dialect. It is best to assume that some German individuals do not understand English. Therefore, it would be wise to learn to speak or write German when engaging in business activities.

Most German companies do not adopt methods that use teamwork. Companies in Germany for the most part do not delegate responsibilities to individuals below the management. Many managers prefer to control everything. Also, it is proper to assume that business relationships are long-lasting. When German companies form relationships with their clients, they expect that the relationship will endure for a long period of time. The logic of the Germans is that relationships take time and a lot of effort to build and maintain. This is the reason why one should expect to have a lasting business relationship. China is also an important country that is heavily involved in international trade. Most fail to realize that the Chinese place value in older methods that relate to business. If one does not learn about the cultural factors of China, obstacles in communication will be numerous. In making decisions, the Chinese deliberate longer than most cultures. Longer deliberation about a decision is a sign of wisdom to the Chinese.

Most people like to make quick decisions, but the Chinese consider this foolish. Also, when making decisions, Chinese individuals want to be involved in every aspect of the decision making process. When in a business setting,

the Chinese do not like to admit that they do not understand a particular concept. The Chinese have a high level of perfectionism, and strive to do their best at everything. Mistakes are not acceptable to the Chinese when completing a task. Also, Chinese people do not tend to ask questions. In a Chinese classroom, it is typical for the professor to lecture and for the student to take notes. Students do not ask questions of the professor. Similarly, in a business setting, the Chinese do not tend to ask questions. 9 Most Chinese do not enjoy being in the public eye, especially when being reprimanded. It is considered disrespectful to the Chinese to be chastised in public.

The Chinese see this as a valid reason for ending a relationship with the individual. OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION OBSTACLES The obstacles involved in business communication are numerous. However, these obstacles can easily be overcome by simply acquiring knowledge of various cultural factors. Knowledge of cultures is key in business communication, as it makes communication effortless. Respecting Differences Knowledge of cultural differences is essential in business communication as well as other aspects of life. There are many cultures within the world, and each culture is a fundamental part of society. If individuals are knowledgeable about the differences, working together will become easier, and fewer problems will arise. Respect is a key factor in understanding differences. Even if a culture is not fully understood by an individual, respect for that particular culture would overcome many obstacles faced in communication.



Respect for diverse cultures aids communication not only in the business atmosphere, but also in everyday life. 10 Multicultural Collaboration It is essential for different cultures to collaborate when dealing with business communication. In order for different cultures to work together effectively, there are a number of guidelines that must be followed:

- Avoid Stereotypes - Stereotypes are major barriers to communication and must be eliminated.
- Practice Communicating with a Different Culture - Practice can ensure easier communication with cultures.
- Avoid Ethnocentrism - Ethnocentrism is the idea that one culture is better than another. Obviously this idea is false, and must be avoided in order to ensure clear communication.
- Listen Attentively - It is important to listen actively when learning about other cultures.

It provides for a better understanding of the culture.

- Look at the Situation Differently - It is important to look various situations in communication from another's perspective in order to get a better understanding of the culture.
- Have Knowledge of Historical Events - Discussion of history helps bridge the gap between cultures, and it also helps to provide a clear path for future communication.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes the cultural factors that affect business communication, and presents guidelines and suggestions for overcoming the barriers between cultures. There Are Many Challenges in Communication Between Cultures Communication varies between cultures, and it is important to understand the factors involved, such as language and gestures. The differences in cultures can be categorized into six patterns: differences in

communication styles, attitudes towards conflict, completing tasks, decision-making styles, attitudes toward disclosure, and knowledge. Cultural Factors Vary From Country to Country It is important to know the cultural factors of countries when engaging in business activities. International trade is an aspect of business that involves communication between cultures.

In order to communicate clearly, knowledge of cultural factors such as language, attire, gestures, and management styles. Obstacles in Business Communication Can Be Eliminated Respect is essential in overcoming communication barriers. By respecting various cultures, working together will become easier. Guidelines for multicultural collaboration include avoiding stereotypes, practicing communication, avoiding ethnocentrism, listening attentively, looking at situations differently, and having knowledge of history.