

# Intercultural communication in the workplace paper



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Different cultures have distinct characteristic communication patterns which sometimes if not understood properly may lead to problems which would not have arisen in a homogeneous group. This can be better understood by taking the example of a heterogeneous group consisting of American and Japanese at a common platform like a business venture. The two cultures are vastly different. It is most apparent at workplace where American directness and precision is at loggerheads with Japanese silence and inability to say no. We look at the specific case of contract negotiation between a team of American business men with a Japanese company in Japan. The American team is counting on bagging the contract and making a profit and they are very happy to know that their hosts speak fluent English albeit with a slight accent. Despite this reassurance they encountered problems almost from the beginning. During the first meeting itself they expected to cover significant ground yet the Japanese seemed to beat around the bush and not much interested in going ahead. In the second meeting too when certain issues were being discussed, the Japanese fell silent for a long time which the American found embarrassing and difficult to fill, ultimately they broke the silence by talking about the tourist spots of their city and the best way to get there. The Japanese even appeared to have some kind of telepathic abilities as all of them seemed to understand each other very well by a few gestures and nods, without exchanging a word amongst themselves before talking to the Americans. Though the Japanese agreed to the conditions set out and they took good care of their guests and spent a lot of money on them, they always managed to wriggle out of signing the contract. Ultimately the Americans lost their patience and returned quite exasperated.

Americans and Japanese are described as the " oddest couple in the world, at <https://assignbuster.com/intercultural-communication-in-the-workplace-paper/>

the opposite end of the cultural spectrum." (<http://www.culturalsavvy.com/japan.htm>) Americans are very direct and articulate, they are used to explicit dialogue and quick decisions. For them time is money and do not like to waste much time in closing deals. The leader goes by his own conviction even if the juniors express some reservations; they too fall in line once the decision is taken.

The Japanese on the other hand like to watch every step they take before taking a decision; it doesn't matter even if the exercise proves futile in the end. They like to build consensus in their team and till it is reached the decision gets deferred even abandoned. Another significant trait is the inability to be brutally honest (opposite of Americans), and say no (Barnlund, 1975). This explains the long silences and digression from the main subject. Unpleasantness is avoided at all costs and even though the decision not to enter into the contact may have been taken in early stages, the same is not conveyed for the fear of appearing rude. They just hope wear down the patience of the opponent who finally get the hint and leave, in our case utterly bewildered.

It would be advisable to learn the characteristic traits of the new culture and its verbal and non verbal idiosyncrasies. Had the American team done some research on the behavioral traits of the Japanese, they would not have been as bewildered or frustrated during the process or its outcome.

1. Barnlund, D. C. (1975). Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States. Tokyo. The Simul Press. (<http://coe-sun.kuis.ac.jp/coe/public/paper/kuis/kume3.pdf>)

2. (<http://www.culturalsavvy.com/japan.htm>) accessed on 12/12/2007  
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