Jared Dyreson

Professor Tammy Tran

Human Communication 101-01

21 February 2018

Prompt Two: High and Low Context Cultures

High context communication is found in cultures that generally rely on context for a conversation. Some of these countries include Japan, Korea, China, and Mexico. In these countries, tradition is a crucial part of everyday life. Cultural components include established hierarchical status, deep personal relationships, etcetera. With this culture, conversations are carried out in manner that may seem peculiar to someone who may not be familiar. For example, a conversation between an American and a Japanese person may never seem to get to the point according to the former. This may not be the case as the Japanese individual is using past experience and prior conversation becomes a point of reference for the current conversation. To build on that example, if the aforementioned American errored during their portion of an important presentation, then the Japanese coworker may not call the American out while in front of their boss; as they do not want to bring unneeded attention upon the other individual. To them, the total amount of work completed by the group as a whole is more important.

By contrast, low context communication is found in societies that need explicit instructions and do not rely on the context of prior events for new conversations. Some of these societies include the United States, Great Britain and France. In these countries, tradition is not held in as high of a regard and most relationships are not forged to be as strong as relationships found in high context countries. In this culture, conversations may be seen to be giving more attention to an individual than is needed. Also they may be interpreted as rude to someone who is unfamiliar with this conversation structure. For instance, two British people are having a heated argument about a coworker who is slacking off and is being overheard by a person from Mexico. The two irritated individuals are thinking that their dispute is valid but the Mexican may think that that they are being crass and disrespectful. To the arguers, they find that singling out an individual gets to the point and makes the conversation more concise.

While living in a collectivist society, an individual has less “personal freedoms” that someone from an individualistic society may find essential. For example, parents in Vietnam do not knock on their child’s door as they assume that their child is okay with them entering. Parents are also held in a higher regard as there is a different priority to who comes first. Generally, the eldest have the most respect as they have lived longer and have more knowledge than the new generation. The main priority of this type of society is group harmony and relationships rather than self-seeking behaviors. Individuals are normally seen as a unit of people and that group completes a given task together. For instance, if someone from Japan found an error by an individual in their group, they would focus on the positive aspects of what the group did and report the mistake after the fact. Generally speaking, collectivist societies tend to lean towards high context communication, which is seen in how an individual functions in the given society.

The cultural ramifications of a collectivist society are in direct opposition to the mindset of an individualistic society. As the name implies, the main focus is on the individual and their progress throughout their life. Personal wealth and equity is held to a high regard where it is not in a collectivist society. Parents would be expected to knock before entering a child’s room as individuals value the right to privacy. Human rights are also a big focus as they deal with individual sovereignty and the inalienable right to live how they want to. They are master of their own destiny until the day they die. This is why in America, citizens are protected under the Bill of Rights to which they adhere to very dearly. With this mentality, it is easy to see how America can be seen as a big brother to other countries, asked for or otherwise. In the last sixty years, America has been involved in numerous conflicts with other countries, yearning to allow freedom and democracy for all people. Citizens of these aforementioned countries have not always seen eye-to-eye with them and has resulted in further conflicts. For individualistic countries such as the United States, it is common to find low context communication. This is seen in how individuals react to world issues regarding personal liberties.