



IIT ROORKEE



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CERTIFICATION COURSE

# **Soft Skills**

## **Lecture 19**

### **Communicating Across Cultures**

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*“Culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. Communication requires coding and symbols that must be learned and shared.”*

*-Alfred G Smith,  
Communication and Culture*



# Cultural Contexts

**High context culture** (Japan, China and Arab countries):

Intuitive, contemplative, stress on non-verbals, meaning to physical and social setting.

**Low context culture** (North America, Scandinavia, France and Germany): Logical, analytical and action-oriented. Values individualism.

# Communication Contexts

## ❑ International

Study of the flow of communication between and among countries.

## ❑ Global

Trans-border transfer of information by groups/ institutions and government.

## ❑ Cross cultural

Comparing phenomena across culture.

## ❑ Intercultural

Face to face interactions among people of diverse cultures.



# Superstition

- In Mexico

Saloon where people gather to drink pulque, a distillate of cactus, is considered good fortune to get worms in your cup.

- In Japan

Maneki neko (beckoning cat).

- In China

Phonetic sound of 8 is most fortuitous of numbers auguring prosperity.



# Contd.

## In Hong Kong

A license plate with the number 8 is quite valuable.  
4 can be read as shi, a homophone for death.

## In Arabs:

Arabs of the same sex stand much closer than North Americans.

U.S: People in U.S. require more room.

# Cultural Variables

- Ethnocentrism
- Education
- Religious faiths
- Country laws
- Social mores
- Language
- Non verbal cues: Space, time, ways of greeting, and touch.

# Ways to say 'no'

- U.S & Canada: shaking heads back and forth.
- Bulgaria: nodding up and down.
- Japan: moving their right hands.
- Sicily: raising their chin.





# Misunderstandings

- Hewlett Packard episode
- Mazda
- Trade show exhibition
- Mad mannerism

How was your weekend?

Arab's way of gifting

German red rose



# Avoid Ethnocentrism

- **Superiority of one's own race**
  - Time is money.
  - stop judging others by your own values.
  - study/observe other cultures.



# Bridge the gaps

- ✓ Tolerance
- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Stop being judgmental
- ✓ Seek common ground
- ✓ Have patience



# Facts to remember

- ❖ People in low context culture are less concerned with face.
- ❖ Mexicans, Asians and members of other high context culture are concerned with social harmony and saving face.
- ❖ Germans are direct, Americans less direct and Japanese very subtle.

# Move beyond stereotypes

- ☐ Stereotype is an oversimplified behavioural pattern applied uncritically to groups.
- ☐ People resent being stereotyped.
- ☐ Discover individual personal qualities.
- ☐ Move from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism.

# Various stages of Ethnorelativism

- ❖ Denial
- ❖ Defence
- ❖ Minimization
- ❖ Acceptance
- ❖ Adaptation
- ❖ Integration

# Summing up

- ✓ Culture and communication are strongly connected.
- ✓ U.S. gives higher status to speakers.
- ✓ Asian culture views communication as co-operation to make meanings.
- ✓ Positive communication approach always pays.

