

Communicating Effectively for Diverse Audiences and Contexts: Part 2

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Introduction

A successful businessman in the United States usually speaks frankly; he knows what he wants to accomplish and the general steps needed to achieve his goal. He does not speak in hyperbole but uses specifics. He is direct and to the point. Body language plays a minor role in his success and his successful negotiations. His facial expressions and hand gestures are low-key and never exaggerated (Emerald Works Limited, 2021). Yet, this once successful businessman who has become known as a real closer suddenly finds himself unable to complete business deals when his work takes him to Mexico. His communication style, totally devoid of the nuances of non-verbal communication is no longer effective. Additionally, the businessman now finds that *how* he says what he says means as much as what he has said. Initially, this will be perplexing until he learns how to adjust his approach for high and low-context cultures (Confederation College, 2021). Mexico has a high-context culture, while the United States has a low-context culture. In this presentation, I will explain the high-context and low-context cultures in detail while sharing tips for communicating within each.

Considering Culture and Context

High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

In the previous illustration, the businessman from the United States came from a low-context culture. In low-context cultures, speakers lean toward being highly analytical and have no problem being very verbose and assuming the listener does not have specific relevant foreknowledge (Confederation College, 2021). Contrarily, in high-context cultures, those in conversation are paying attention to a lot more than merely the words being spoken (Confederation College, 2021). A few of the extra elements that they are taking in include interpersonal relationships, nonverbal elements such as facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, vocal intonation, and even elements of the communication such as the time of day chosen for the conversation, location the conversation is being held and other elements which could have been chosen by the speaker for an undisclosed reason (Confederation College, 2021). In the United States' low-context culture, eye contact and directness of speech may be seen as highly respectable, conversely, in high-context cultures these could be construed as signs of disrespect (Confederation College, 2021).

Communicating Across High-Context Cultures

Countries that are known to have a high-context culture include Russia, China, Africa, Saudi Arabia, Greece, and Mexico (Finnie, 2019). In one of these high-context cultures, come to a negotiation ready to debate (Meyer, 2015). In a high-context culture, it is perfectly acceptable to strongly express disagreement (Meyer, 2015). In fact, failing to do so will result in losing respect and always having to compromise on every issue. Another tip for successful communications in high-context cultures is to always seek clarification and provide the other party an opportunity to explain more (Meyer, 2015). Lastly, when communicating in a high-context culture, pay high attention to non-verbal cues which includes facial expressions, nods, gestures, and how words are said (Meyer, 2015).

Communicating Across Low-Context Cultures

In addition to the United States, other countries with a low-context culture include Germany, Scandinavia, and England (Finnie, 2019). These cultures are not emotionally charged and thus those seeking to communicate effectively ought to avoid raising their voice, laughing with great passion, touching the other party in conversation, or gesticulating wildly (Meyer, 2015). In communication in low-context cultures, be sure to always be clear and direct (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016). Additionally, don't be afraid to over-explain and make things abundantly clear (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016). In high-context cultures (which were just examined) this may seem like an insult to the other party, nearly insinuating that the other party was too dull to adequately pick up on what may have been obvious; contrarily, in low-context cultures, over explaining eliminates confusion and helps ensure that all parties are on the same page. Lastly, always remember to say what you mean and mean what you say, since what is said is more important than how it is said (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016).

Communicating Across Mixed-Context Cultures

Countries with mixed-context cultures include France, Italy, and Spain (Finnie, 2019). Communicating in countries with mixed-context cultures can always be different because either those in the country have varying communication styles or they possess a mashup and juxtaposition of context cultures (Hahn & Molinsky, 2018). The single most actionable recommendation for communicating across mixed-context cultures is absolutely to be equipped with knowledge about context cultures and to observe those you communicate with and adapt similar posturing, non-verbal communication styles, verbal dynamics, and other elements of their communication style to learn techniques and adapt quickly (Fuld, 2012). There are a few other actionable recommendations, such as being patient when speaking and not allowing difficulties in communicating to easily frustrate you (Miami University, 2021). Thirdly, always try to speak clearly and avoid jargon or the use of slang (Miami University, 2021). Finally, learn to possess cultural sensitivity and to exhibit genuine care since genuinity, or genuineness, can often be perceived and will prevail (Miami University, 2021).

Conclusion

The primary take away is to learn about differences in context culture before crossing into another country's culture and to adopt a cultural sensitivity. It is possible to feel that one's own culture or communication style is the only correct way. This, however, is improper and certainly not true. Communicating with others from different context cultures should build in oneself an understanding of other cultures and a *sensitivity*: A desire to adapt, to not mistakenly show disrespect, and to learn what is necessary to communicate effectively (Miami University, 2021). When communicating across context cultures, set aside pride and enter the interaction with an observant eye. It is possible to mimic the communication styles observed in others and this often can help prevent mistakenly showing disrespect, coming off as overbearing, or being walked over (Hahn & Molinsky, 2018).

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