

SCENARIO

Paul Miller looks at his watch. He needs to leave for the airport to catch a plane. Paul has been in Honduras for three days, trying to close a deal for the purchase of a small local textile plant. He made the trip after initial fax contact and some third-party mediation to establish contact with Miguel Mujarez, who wants to sell the plant. Paul was told by his friend Raul Peña that a solid relationship with the Mujarez family is essential because so many employees in the company have worked for the plant for decades. The plant, which has been in the Mujarez family since the early 1950s, is very much a family operation.

Paul had scheduled four days for the trip. He spent half a day with the plant manager, two days and two evenings with Miguel Mujarez, one day with a cousin, Juan Mujarez, and one day with the plant employees. Paul is anxious to get a positive response from Miguel, sign the contract, and return to Atlanta.

At dinner, on his last night in Honduras, Paul asked Miguel point-blank when they could complete the deal. Miguel acted as if he hadn't heard the question and continued to discuss one of his sons' feats in soccer. Then he asked Paul about universities in Atlanta, since he hoped to interest his oldest son in attending a school there. He spoke at length about the fine workers at the plant and asked numerous questions about Paul's family and other matters that Paul felt were not relevant. The discussion seemed to be going in circles.

On the final day of Paul's visit, Miguel was supposed to meet him at the office at 10:00. It's now after 12:30, and Miguel is not there. Paul has asked the secretary when Miguel will arrive. She'd said "Soon" several times but finally acknowledged that Miguel probably won't arrive until the late afternoon because his parents have arrived in town. Paul tries to control his frustration: if the secretary knew at 9:30 that Miguel would not be coming to the office, why hadn't she told him? Why wait until only a short time remains before he must leave for the airport?

Juan Mujarez arrives at that moment, expresses great happiness at seeing Paul, and says he hopes all the parties can discuss the sale in a few weeks. Paul is amazed and tells Juan that he came to Honduras to complete the deal. Juan expresses regret and begins discussing an appropriate time for Paul's next visit.

On the way to the airport, Paul recalls the experience of a friend who had not completed a business transaction with a Japanese firm that had just moved to Ohio until the company had been in Ohio for nearly a year. Paul decides that he cannot spend any more time on this matter. Miguel obviously does not want to sell the company soon, and Paul cannot determine a price that will persuade Miguel to sell. He has wasted nearly a week in trying to close the sale. He admits, wearily, that he just doesn't know how to do business with Central Americans.

chapter 7

Writing for International Readers

- Establishing a Perspective on International Communication
- Understanding Readers from Various Cultures Individualism versus Collectivism: Valuing Either Individuals or Groups
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When you as an employee in a business organization think about your audience while planning a report, letter, proposal, or e-mail, you may realize that some or all of your readers do not have English as their first language. Because of the power of technology to link cities and countries around the world, we now live in a global village. Business and technical organizations are becoming increasingly international. Many have offices in countries around the globe, as diminishing trade barriers enable U.S. organizations to do business throughout the world. Because of the globalization of business, effective written communications are as important in dealing with people in other countries as they are in dealing with U.S. residents. However, communication is culture specific: You cannot write to people in other countries the way you write to people in the United States. How you communicate is determined by the culture of the readers with whom you wish to communicate. In this book, we primarily emphasize strategies for developing business and technical documents for U.S. readers. However, we also want to introduce you to a procedure for planning documents that will be effective with readers in other cultures. In today's global market, you must be able to communicate with people everywhere.

A number of books have been written about protocols for doing business in other countries. These books explain business etiquette that must be followed when individuals wish to do business in another country. At the end of this chapter, we will list several of the growing number of books that you will find useful as well as interesting as you attempt to understand how culture determines the proper ways to meet and do business with individuals in other

countries: greeting individuals according to the traditions of other countries, the appropriateness of shaking hands, the design and presentation of your business card, proper format for business letters and reports, proper deportment during dinner parties, gift giving, and the significance of holidays and colors are only a few matters that you need to learn about before you make contact with individuals in another country.

The study of international communication is a separate area of study, but here we provide guidelines for written business communications that will enable you to make the transition between the U.S. culture and other cultures. Some of the example documents we provide here (and in Chapter 13, Correspondence), will help you see how culture influences the preparation of documents for readers of different traditions.

ESTABLISHING A PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Designing effective written business communications for readers in other countries requires that you approach the development of international communication documents from four perspectives:

The Fatal Communication Error: Assuming that the United States is the greatest country in the world. Thus, you can do and say whatever you want: business people in other cultures will automatically follow your lead because the U.S. way is obviously the best way.

No perspective could be more detrimental to your success with people from other cultures. Outside the United States, you must learn to operate by another set of rules.

Cultures vary, but no one culture is inherently superior to any other.

1. Communicating successfully with people from other cultures requires that you play by their “ground rules.” When your audience is an individual or an organization in another country, you need to carefully analyze this audience to understand its perspective.
2. The U.S. culture differs dramatically from most cultures in the world.
3. Everyone thinks his or her culture is “the best.” You may not like many of the characteristics of the cultures of people with whom you need to communicate, but you must respect the differences between cultures and the perspectives of readers from outside your own tradition.

UNDERSTANDING READERS FROM VARIOUS CULTURES

Anthropologists tell us that cultures differ in a number of specific ways. As a result, readers in different cultures have different expectations. Cultural anthropologists such as Geert Hofstede,¹ Fons Trompenaars,² Edward Hall,³ and

Lisa Hoecklin⁴ have isolated a number of cultural characteristics—differences in values—that enable us to understand differences among cultures based on our understanding of how values differ among cultures. We will discuss nine major values that shape differences among cultures. These points of difference are drawn from the research of these cultural anthropologists. For our purposes, these values are important because they can affect written communication. We will show you example documents that illustrate how values affect communications. To be an effective global communicator, you must first understand the U.S. culture and know how characteristics of our culture shape written documents prepared for distribution in the United States. Understanding specific cultural differences that affect communication will give you a good beginning for understanding how to communicate with business people the world over.

In Table 7-1, you will see how a number of major countries rate on four of the value dimensions measured by Geert Hofstede, who is perhaps the leading expert on intercultural differences. The higher the score, the more a particular value is stressed in the culture.

Individualism Versus Collectivism: Valuing Either Individuals Or Groups

In the United States, individualism is a predominant cultural characteristic. As Lisa Hoecklin states:

Individualism is a concern for yourself as an individual as opposed to concern for the priorities and rules of the group to which you belong. The majority of the people in the world live in societies where the interests of the group take precedence over the interests of the individual. In these societies, the group to which you belong is the major source of your identity and the unit to which you owe lifelong loyalty. For only a minority of the world's population do individual interests prevail over group interests.⁵

Individualism is the driving force behind all other U.S. cultural characteristics. As Table 7-1 shows, the United States tends to be the most individualist country in the world. Reverence for individualism expresses itself in a number of major ways, which can be generalized as follows: In the United States, children learn to think in terms of “I.” Individual achievements are often valued over team achievement, and even in team efforts, specific team members are usually singled out for outstanding contributions. Common sayings like “every man for himself,” “the winner takes all,” “be independent,” “look out for yourself” illustrate the pronounced individualism in the United States. Emphasis is placed on the individual's responsibility for his or her own destiny. Another common theme you have probably heard: If you fail, then you failed because you didn't work or try hard enough. Only within the past two decades have students and employees learned to work as teams. U.S. business people tend to separate

their business lives from their personal lives. In the U.S. business culture, how one feels about an individual should not interfere with sound business decisions involving that person. Americans tend to be direct and to the point. They are hard driving, pragmatic, and competitive in work and often in recreation. It is often said that Americans live to work. Because of the Puritan influence that has long dominated U.S. culture, a strong work ethic is highly valued. Thus, work—success through work—often takes precedence over family and friendships. Because of the importance of success, the individual's self-worth is often bound up with his or her career achievements.

In group-valuing (collectivist) cultures, individuals are a part of tight social networks in which members identify closely with their families and business organization. They are motivated by the group's needs and achievements. The individual's success is valued as it reflects the success of the group. In collectivist societies, the success of the team is more important than the success of the individual. Decisions are made by groups. Employees in collectivist societies act according to the interest of the group, which may not always mesh with the individual's desires. Self-effacement along with deference to the interest of the group is the standard. Earnings may be shared with relatives. Promotions are based on seniority within the groups. Often relatives of employees are hired, as relationships among those in the group are seen as more important than benefiting from the talents of someone from outside the group.

People's business lives and their personal lives are merged. People are polite, formal, and indirect, and concerns about the welfare of the group are emphasized over the success and needs of any one person. Collectivist cultures allow individuals to be expressive within the group, even though formality and deference are valued within the group and to individuals outside the group. Many collectivist societies value family welfare over business issues. That western cultures are more individualist than Latin American, Pacific Rim, and Third World countries is illustrated by the patterns discernible in the ratings of Table 7-1.

Implications for Communication Written communications are valued in the United States because they are often used to document individual actions. Because the U.S. culture is heterogeneous, written documents are very important to ensure precise understanding and compliance. In contrast, group-valuing organizations tend to prize oral communication over written communication. When you are writing to individuals within a group-valuing culture, you will want to focus on how the issues you are discussing reflect on the organization and the actions of the group. You will want to de-emphasize yourself: Avoid excessive use of "I" in discussing business and focus on establishing rapport with the organization, rather than specific individuals. Emphasize your relationships with the group before launching into discussion of the business you wish to transact.

Documents prepared in collectivist cultures may not be as explicit or as detailed as they are in individualist cultures, like the United States. Because collectivist cultures value “group think,” individuals in groups share values and ideas: They do not have to illustrate every idea and document every fact by explicit verbal and numerical communication. In collectivist societies, action is decided and agreed on by the group, and therefore the fact-finding process occurs in a relative rule-free environments. However, the more heterogeneous the group, the more explicit documents will need to be.

Separation of Business and Private Relationships

How a culture treats and values relationships is critical in understanding that culture and in determining how best to communicate with people in that culture. The treatment of relationships is directly connected with a society’s emphasis on groups or individuals, as collectivist (group-valuing) cultures are generally more relationship oriented than individualist cultures. For example, in the United States personal relationships are usually kept separate from business relationships. Business decisions are based on business information only. Keeping one’s private life separate from one’s business life is expected, and attempts to establish or preserve this boundary are respected. When doing business, individuals are expected to present an opaque, objective department.

In cultures that value individualism, people have more open public space, but private space is more closely guarded. The U.S. approach to business is direct, open, rapid, and extroverted. Many people outside the country, perceive the U.S. tendency always to be to the point as harsh and abrasive. Americans, who separate work and private lives, tend to view business relationships differently from personal relationships. In business dealings, the focus is on business objectives. Relationships are viewed only as a necessary, brief prelude to initiating and completing a business transaction.

In collectivist cultures, like those in Mexico and in the Pacific Rim nations, people do not separate public and private lives. One is influenced by the other without any shame or excuse. To representatives of cultures that separate business from personal affairs, however, collectivist-oriented business persons appear indirect, non committal, and evasive. In a collectivist culture, promotions are often made on the basis of friendship rather than competence. What is right depends on the relationships involved. Many organizations are composed of family members. Business is conducted in accordance with family needs. A culture that does not distinguish business from private relationships bases its notion of efficiency not on time to completion but on how well one understands others. In such a culture, you can expect to spend extensive time building relationships with individuals in the company with which you want to do business.

Implications for Communication Unlike U.S. communications which focus on business, communications in relationship-oriented cultures de-emphasize

business and emphasize the relationships among the individuals involved in a given business transaction. Cultures that do not separate business and private relationships will expect communications that are formal, reserved but positive, and indirect in dealing with business issues. Emphasizing the relationship between you and your business organization and your reader will be paramount. An extremely efficient business presentation may be perceived as inappropriately direct, and your ideas may be rejected accordingly.

Power Distance between Social Ranks

Inequalities exist in any society, and some people have more power, respect, status, and wealth than others. Hofstede defines power distance as the degree of closeness, or interdependence, that exists among members of organizational hierarchies. Do superiors consult subordinates about decisions? Do employees feel comfortable in disagreeing or questioning superiors' decisions? Is interdependence on authority evident in supervisor–subordinate relationships, and if so, to what extent? In short, power distance is measured in terms of the prevalence of ranks or levels of authority. Column 2 of Table 7-1 shows how various cultures were rated on power distance.

In high-power-distance cultures, employees manage their work according to their superior's specifications, and authoritarian attitudes are readily accepted. Inequalities among people are both expected and desired. Hierarchies in organizations are pronounced; the powerful have privileges that the less powerful do not have, and subordinates expect to take orders. In high-power-distance cultures, bosses are expected to make unilateral decisions. Employees do what they are told without asking questions. Superiors are authoritarian figures. Disagreeing with "the boss" is unacceptable. High-power-distance cultures are characterized by steep organizational pyramids and close supervision of employees. In high-power-distance cultures, age is a positive factor and a major qualification for leadership roles. In high-power-distance cultures, formality and politeness in communications are considered extremely important. One is never openly aggressive.

In low-power-distance cultures, the individual is freer to follow his or her own preferences and criticize management. Inequalities among people are minimized, subordinates are consulted, and decentralization in responsibility is popular. Employees have upward mobility, and teamwork is valued because interdependence exists between the less and the more powerful.

U.S. business organizations vary in terms of the power structures. The number of levels in an organization—and the power at each level—vary significantly with the size and type of organization. This range of power explains why you were told in Chapter 4 to determine the relationships between you and your reader, to choose your content and tone in terms of that relationship. The power distance within the organization tells you how open, direct, or formal you

can be in stating your ideas. The United States, however, is generally a midlevel power-distance country. Because of the emphasis on the responsibility of the individual and the individual's responsibility for his or her destiny, Americans like to be involved in decision making. Central decision making is accepted, but those in the organization below the leaders expect to be heard. Great differences in rank are expected, but those who have rank ideally have earned it through extreme individual effort, success in achieving business goals, and hard work. While hierarchies in organizations are dominant, U.S. organizations are moving toward "flatter" organizations and participatory management.

In many of today's U.S. organizations, strong individuals must become "team players" who can lead the group. Youth is often more revered than age. Low-power-distance business cultures and business organizations have flatter organizations, more team decision making, fewer autonomous "bosses," and more decisions coming from group (committee) recommendations. The variations in power distance in the U.S. culture explains why the country has a score of 40 in Table 7-1. Understanding the extent of teamwork in a particular U.S. company, as well as an international company, can be critical to your success in dealing and working with that company.

Implications for Communication In high-power-distance cultures, using correct forms of address can be extremely important: knowing specifically who should receive a report or letter, the title or rank of that person, the names of all individuals who should appear on the distribution list. Establishing the correct tone in addressing the intended reader(s) is thus important in establishing the correct "distance" between writer and reader. Therefore, tone in documents prepared for readers in high-power-distance cultures may need to be more formal if the writer is preparing a document for someone who holds a relatively superior position. In contrast, in preparing documents for readers in low-power-distance cultures, strict recognition of business hierarchies and the use of formal address gain less favor. The style of the message can be more casual.

Universal or Relative View of Truth

Cultures also differ in how they perceive truth. A universal view of truth means that what is true can be discovered, defined, and applied in all situations. In other cultures, truth is relative. It changes depending on the needs of the situation or the group affected by the decision. In many collectivist cultures, relationships and the needs of people in the organization (many who may be relatives or family members) are more important than the objective truth of a situation. The United States exemplifies what Trompenaars calls a universalist culture: "Truth" exists; clear differences exist in "right" and "wrong," and people should be guided by universal rules of behavior that are considered to apply to everyone. "Rules" should be laid down in strictly worded agreements and contracts. Once defined, the "rules" govern business and behavior. This concept of truth evolves from the Puritan roots of the United States: Truth exists; it should transcend and guide the

actions of individuals, and at times it may take precedence over the immediate needs of people.

“Particularist” cultures, in contrast to “universalist” cultures, believe that truth is relative. What is “true” and what should be done depend on a particular situation. Human relationships are more important than rules, and written contracts are not held to be binding, if situations arise that make certain provisions undesirable. If a problem involving people arises, then a written contract is less important than the human issues that affect the contract. In particularist cultures, people are more important than contracts.

Implications for Communication In a universalist culture, writers are advised to be as specific and concrete as possible. Clarity and precision in format, language, and meaning are valuable. In a culture in which truth is relative, comments may be less direct and more dependent on the situation. The message may appear vague. Oral communications may be more significant than written communications. Rules that apply in one business situation may cease to apply when a different situation arises. In collectivist cultures, be sure to discuss the impact of the situation on the group.

Whether the Entire Message Is Contained in the Text

In the United States, documents are expected to “contain” the complete meaning. The “truth” of the situation must be contained in the text because texts document facts and human actions. These are the hallmarks of a text-oriented culture. Written agreements and statements are very important. “Talk is cheap.” What you say you will do means little if you do not put your promises in writing. Documents contain all details needed. Conditions not included in the written document are not recognized as applicable, and obligations not spelled out in the text are not legally binding.

In other cultures, the “meaning” of a business situation or a document is much more than the document. Meaning comes from the people and the human issues involved in a given decision. The meaning of a document—such as a contract—depends on the situation. The document may be ignored, even if it is a contract. In such cultures, schedules are flexible; being late to dinner, meetings, or other engagements is expected and acceptable. Establishing relationships is seen as more important than doing business. Business lives and work lives are intertwined. Thus, business days and documents are less structured, less efficient, less direct than U.S. documents.

Implications for Communication The text of U.S. documents is expected to contain all facts necessary to arrive at a solid business decision. Contracts are considered binding. In non-textual cultures, the language is suggestive, oblique, and theoretical; documents themselves are often wordy, tending to focus on organizational situations rather than pristine factual details. What a document

ultimately “means” may be a function of the circumstances under which it was prepared. Business obligations may not be clearly or completely stated.

Whether Uncertainty Is to Be Avoided or Accepted

Another important cultural difference focuses on how a culture tolerates uncertainty. (How cultures vary on this value is presented in column 3 of Table 7-1.) Members of cultures that avoid uncertainty appear to be anxiety-prone people who perceive the uncertainties inherent in life as threats that must be fought. In these cultures, employees fear failure, take fewer risks, resist change, and place a premium on job security, career patterning, and company benefits. The manager is expected to issue clear instructions, and subordinates’ initiatives are tightly controlled. Employees in cultures that dislike uncertainty accept formal procedures, wide power distances within hierarchies, and highly structured organizations. Societies that dislike uncertainty exhibit high stress and anxiety levels, need structured environments, believe that time is money, and believe in the value of hard work.

In contrast, people raised in cultures that accept uncertainty are more likely to take each day as it comes. Conflict and competitiveness can be used constructively, and dissent will be tolerated. Needs for written rules and regulations are relatively few, and rules that turn out to be unrealistic or unenforceable can be easily changed. Time is seen as a framework for orientation; rules are flexible; precision and punctuality are not paramount. Emotions are not shown, and rules that are highly restrictive are avoided. The United States scores about midway on the continuum of avoiding/accepting uncertainty.

Implications for Communication In *cultures* that accept uncertainty, written documents may be less problematic than they are in cultures that seek to avoid uncertainty, where documents are valued for documentation and governance purposes. In *companies* that dislike uncertainty, precisely written documents, forms, tables, graphs, procedures, policies, and style sheets are valued because they create uniformity and clarity. While tolerance for uncertainty varies in the United States, fear of litigation is driving more companies toward insistence on precision in documents.

The Power and Value of Time

Another cultural value that affects communication is the value a culture places on time. The United States is one of the most time-conscious cultures in the world. People in this country value not only productivity, but also efficiency in process and product. Effective use of time—time management: doing more and more work in less and less time—is a cherished U.S. ideal. While many collectivist cultures value relationships before work, here we tend to value work before relationships. Many cultures consider relationships with friends and family, the

need to enjoy each day, and the time spent in building and maintaining relationships as more important than efficient execution of work. Cultures that value time usually value productivity. Cultures that value relationships place people before business. In these cultures, efficient use of time is less valuable than the slower paced focus on relationship building and weaving business with relationships.

Implications for Communication When you address members of cultures that value relationships rather than productivity, emphasize relationships with the persons with whom you are doing business. Make business secondary to the relationship. In contrast, in preparing documents for U.S. readers, emphasize the business goal: Be precise, direct, and complete. Make goals, expectations, and commitments known.

Masculine versus Feminine

Many cultures give males superior positions. Men, rather than women, serve in positions of authority. Occupations tend to be segregated by gender, and inequality of the sexes is generally accepted. Expectations to pursue and succeed in careers apply more to men than to women, who are primarily homemakers. Masculine cultures exemplify high job stress, achievement, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and financial success. Feminine cultures, in contrast, feature less occupational segregation by gender. Women occupy well-paid jobs, and the work environment shows less stress, more awareness of individuals' personal needs, and more concern for the importance of family and social issues. Feminine cultures value nurturing relationships, consensus, compromise, and negotiation. Column 4 of Table 7-1 shows how cultures rate on this dimension. Clearly, the United States tends to be a masculine culture.

Implications for Communication American women need to avoid assuming a domineering stance when working with men from cultures outside of the United States where males assume positions of authority. When American women write to men in these masculine cultures, the tone should be formal and polite. Avoiding immediate, direct discussion of business issues is imperative. Establishing rapport with the individual within the organization is critical. In general, communications for feminine cultures should focus on relationships, while communications for non-U.S. masculine cultures should be assertive and decisive, with an emphasis on the business transaction.

CONSIDERING CULTURE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

The most important factors influencing how you plan and then draft your document are your audience and your purpose. Thus it is essential to understand to whom you are writing and why you are writing. As you consider these factors in planning communications that include international readers, you will want to answer the following questions. Because many of these questions pertain to U.S.

documents, you can see how effective use of international communications requires that you broaden your perspective as you plan a document:

- To whom is this message directed?
- What do you know about the reader(s)? Age? Interests? Education? Job responsibilities? Title?
- What is their attitude toward you, and how do they perceive the topic?
- What are their particular characteristics, as gleaned from messages they have written or encounters you have had with them?
- If the document is being directed to a reader in a non-U.S. culture, what are its characteristics?
 - Is it oriented toward the individual or toward the group?
 - Do people separate their business and private relationships?
 - Does this culture value success of individuals or success of groups?
 - Do people see truth as universal or as relative to particular circumstances?
 - Is the entire message—and what it means—usually contained in the text?
 - Do the people value time and efficiency?
- How well are the members of your target audience able to read English?
- What is the situation that has led to your need to write this document?
- What purpose do you hope to achieve? What do you want to happen as a result of this document?
- Based on the broad value characteristics of the culture, what choices do you need to make about
 - Structure (deductive or inductive)
 - Organization of ideas
 - Degree of specificity about business purpose
 - Type of information disclosed about you and your organization
 - Quantity of detail presented about you and your organization
 - Style
 - Sentence length
 - Word choice
 - Address protocols
 - Tone
 - Formatting techniques
 - Graphics

In short, considering culture is simply another dimension of considering your audience and the context in which your message will be read. As the guidelines in Table 7-2, suggest, your answer to these questions will affect how you write to any audience.

EXAMPLE INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS FOR EXAMINATION

To see how cultural characteristics can effect document design, consider the

following example documents, which were written by individuals in the United States, Mexico, and Pakistan.

Figure 7-1 is a typical U.S. business letter. Note that it is direct, concise, and focused on the business issues at hand. The main point of the letter appears in the opening paragraph. The closing paragraph indicates the action required and the time constraints. The middle paragraphs are denotative, and the content is developed in a logical sequence with no digressions. The style is informal but efficient. The point is straightforwardly presented: that is, the “medium is the message.” Because of a cultural preoccupation with efficient use of time, commitment to achievement, and aggressive business practices, most U.S. business letters are direct and concise. Business is separate from personal issues, even if the writer knows the reader in a nonbusiness context.

U.S. business letters usually follow this development scheme illustrated in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-3: is a Pakistani business letter. Note that the style is formal and courteous. The point is politely stated. As Table 7-1 indicates, Pakistan is a collectivist country with a high score in uncertainty avoidance. Thus, a letter that seeks to collect a debt uses an extremely tactful approach. The main news occurs in the second paragraph. The writer attempts to build a solid case—asking the reader to examine the invoice amounts—before venturing the request. Note the courteous closing. Note the differences in letter format between this letter and Figure 7-1, which uses U.S. block style. The Pakistani business letter follows the development scheme of Figure 7-4.

Figure 7-5, a translation of a letter by a Mexican business consultant in Mexico City, introduces his services to a U.S. company that has recently opened an office in Mexico City. The consultant has been working through a friend at the U.S. consulate. In Mexico, as in many Latin American countries, you must establish relationships and credibility with friends of those with whom you wish to do business before directly contacting the individuals in the target company. Thus, the reader will know about the writer, and the writer quickly alludes to the mutual friend.

Because Mexico is a collectivist culture in which relationships are considered more valuable than time, there is a more relaxed approach to doing business. This characteristic of Mexico’s culture expresses itself in the inexpediency of the sentences themselves. Directness, conciseness, and efficiency are not major issues because the process of doing business, of building relationships is what is important. The liquid quality of the language is, in an important sense, preserved by the masculine focus of the culture, which exudes a formal bravado. Note that no time frame is suggested; no plan of action stipulated. The style is ornate, effusive, aesthetic—certainly not concise or direct. The style is more complex; the sentences, less efficiently structured. The ideas

presented seem more theoretical and less pragmatic. Many non Western business cultures that are collectivist will allude to the purpose about midway through the letter. However, the business issue is obliquely stated. Figure 7-6 shows the development scheme of this letter, which also differs from the U.S. letter (Figure 7-1) in format.

WRITING BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS TO READERS IN OTHER CULTURES

If you find that you will be communicating with people from other cultures, particularly in a business context, be sure that you do research on business etiquette for each country. These procedures include understanding the use of business cards, dressing appropriately, making proper introductions and greetings, knowing how business decisions are made and knowing what topics to discuss and to avoid in all conversations, business or social. An increasing number of books and videos, as well as information on the World Wide Web, are available to help you understand the perspectives of readers in other cultures.

Initially, however, what is important is that you understand that what is acceptable in written communications in the United States will likely be unacceptable in many other countries. Knowing this fact is an important first step in learning how to communicate about technical and business issues with people in other countries.

Even though you may be able to use English to a reader in another culture—English is becoming the international technical language—you should attempt to assess aspects of that country's culture and values that may affect communication. For example, for collectivist countries, try to emphasize the group rather than individuals. Attempt to establish rapport with your readers rather than emphasizing the business objective. For countries that exemplify and expect differences in ranks (high power distance), be aware of the possible need for titles, respect for those in powerful positions within the organization, and the status of women in the country. Use Appendix B (Letter and Memorandum Format) to learn how to set up business letters.

You can see how these broad cultural characteristics are embedded in written communications by examining a letter written by a woman real estate agent in the United States to a Japanese reader who has just moved to Texas.

Situation 1 (Figure 7-7)

Katherine Ashcroft, a commercial leasing agent, contacts Keisuke Ashizawa, a Japanese engineer whose team is currently working on a research project in Texas. Mr. Ashizawa, who has discovered that he will need to remain in the United States longer than he had expected, has expressed to his American colleague Kevin Graham, an interest in leasing

a condominium. He has also discussed with Kevin a desire to find a local book. With these requests in mind, Kevin has offered to introduce Mr. Ashizawa to Ms. Ashcroft. The businesswoman would like to work with Mr. Ashizawa (and hopefully other members of his team's research group). After receiving a call from Kevin, she writes the letter shown in Figure 7-7.

Figure 7-7 is concise and polite rather than aggressive. The main issue is not discussed until the final paragraph, and this is not the ultimate goal of the writer, who wishes to become Mr. Ashizawa's real estate agent. In addition, the request in the letter is indirectly stated. The style is formal, even though the writer attempts to establish rapport with the reader before even mentioning the request. Because the writer is a woman and the reader, a man, the writer is careful to sound appropriately deferential, since the Japanese culture scores high on the masculine/feminine scale. No time-table is mentioned on any of the issues. Japan is a collectivist culture in which relationships must be established before business can be conducted. It also scores high on avoiding uncertainty. Building trust and de-emphasizing the business goal are critical.

CULTURE AND GRAPHICS

Decisions about graphics as well as text need to be determined by the culture of your intended readers.⁶ For example, what are the reading processes of your audience? Do they read left to right or from right to left? This information will help you know how to arrange graphics so that they will be viewed by the reader in the proper sequence.

1. If you are unsure about reading habits, consider using arrows with graphics to show the direction that your graphics flow, (see Figure 7-8). Or, use numbers on graphics to show the order in which something should be read.
2. Concepts of good and bad can also differ among cultures. In U.S. tables, what is considered acceptable and preferable is usually placed on the right, while in Asian cultures the left-hand side is one place of honor.
3. Avoid acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, slang, and colloquialisms. Use plain typefaces. Do not attempt to use humor, as what is humorous varies among cultures.
4. Be sure to use graphics that are internationally recognized, (see Figure 7-9).
5. Avoid graphics that may be interpreted differently in other cultures—animals, religious symbols, national emblems, hand gestures, and colors. For examples, dogs are considered pets in much of the West. To many Asians, they are food. Cattle have an honored position in India, but in the United States their meat is eaten.
6. Remember that colors can be particularly problematic, so black and white graphics are usually the safest choice, (see Table 7-3).
7. Because of differences in gender roles among cultures and differences in how body language is interpreted, make graphics of people as gender-neutral as

possible. Also avoid depicting hand gestures in graphics, as positions of fingers, hands, and arms have different meanings in different cultures.

8. If possible, try to determine how fluent your readers will be in English. For example, if your readers lack such fluency, use simple, concrete words and short sentences. Avoid abbreviations.
9. Watch how you use document design. Many cultures do not use boldface headings or pay much attention to document design principles. Many Mexican documents, for example, will use few headings, and these are underlined. Many cultures do not use extensive tables and graphs. Format strategies for correspondence—salutations, dates, subject lines, closings, and titles—also differ among cultures. American word processing programs have helped unify document design through use of common templates among international corporations, but differences still exist and should be respected.

A FINAL WORD

A number of reference books are available that provide writers extensive guidance on where to place dates, inside addresses, and reference lines in international documents. These books can also be helpful in explaining what titles to give individuals. These details are important, but none are as important as how you develop the content of the letter. As you saw in Chapter 5, the word order of English, its emphasis on concreteness and brevity can be construed as rude, insulting, and improperly aggressive by readers in other cultures. Particularly in Romance language cultures, sentences are more fluid, more complex, and the meaning more oblique. Understanding how to capture in English the tone expected by your international reader is the challenge. Remember that culture determines rhetoric. Germans prefer details and background information. The French like a formal and authoritative approach. U.S. readers like everything short and direct. The Japanese like instructions that are accurate but polite. Middle Eastern readers value grandiloquent, florid prose and impassioned style. In China, theory is stated, and readers are expected to determine details. However, the important point is to remember that just as we are steeped in our culture people from other countries are steeped in theirs. To communicate effectively with them, we must understand the concept and role of culture and some of the ways that our traditions diverge from other throughout the world. Ultimately, we must respect those differences.

GUIDES TO DOING BUSINESS IN CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD

An increasing number of books and videotapes are available on differences between the U.S. culture and other cultures around the world. Understanding some of these differences, as they apply to doing business in other countries, will help you understand how to communicate, orally and in writing, with individuals in other countries. Videotapes that discuss the meaning of gestures and body language can be particularly helpful in illustrating such differences. The following books have been selected because they provide concise, useful information

about different cultures and will help you understand how culture affects communication styles and methods.

- Axtell, Roger E. *Do's and Taboos of Hosting International Visitors*. New York: Wiley, 1990.
- . *Do's and Taboos of Using English around the World*. New York: Wiley, 1995.
- . *Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language around the World*. New York: Wiley, 1998.
- Axtell, Roger E., Tami Briggs, Margaret Corcoran, and Mary Beth Lamb, eds. *Do's and Taboos around the World for Women in Business*. New York: Wiley, 1997.
- Bosrock, Mary Murray. *Put Your Best Foot Forward, Europe: A Fearless Guide to International Communication and Behavior*. St. Paul, MN: International Education Systems, 1995.
- . *Put Your Best Foot Forward, Mexico/Canada: A Fearless Guide to Communication and Behavior/NAFTA*. St. Paul, MN: International Education Systems, 1995.
- . *Put Your Best Foot Forward, Russia: A Fearless Guide to International Communication and Behavior*. St. Paul, MN: International Education Systems, 1995.
- Cole, Gregory. *Passport Indonesia: Your Pocket Guide to Indonesian Business, Customs, and Etiquette*. San Rafael, CA: World Trade Press, 1997.
- Doing Business Internationally: The Resource for Business and Social Etiquette*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Training Press, 1997.
- Gannon, Martin J. *Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys through 23 Countries*. 2d ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
- Gao, Ge, and Shella Ting-Toomey. *Communicating Effectively with the Chinese*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Goldman, Alan. *Doing Business with the Japanese: A Guide to Successful Communication, Management, and Diplomacy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.
- Hofstede, Geert H. *Cultures and Organizations; Software of the Mind*. 2d ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.
- Hall, Edward T., and Mildred Reed Hall, *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French, and Americans*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990.
- Hamlet, Janice D., ed. *Afrocentric Visions: Studies in Culture and Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Hoecklin, Lisa. *Managing Cultural Differences: Strategies for Competitive Advantage*. Wokingham, UK: Addison-Wesley, 1995.
- Irvin, Harry. *Communicating with Asia: Understanding People and Customs*. St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996.
- Joshi, Monaj. *Passport India: Your Pocket Guide to Indian Business, Customs, and Etiquette*. San Rafael, CA: World Trade Press, 1997.
- Kim, Eun Young. *A Cross-Cultural Reference of Business Practices in a New Korea*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1996.
- Leppert, Paul. *Doing Business with Mexico*. Fremont, CA: Jain, 1996.

- Li, Jenny. *Passport China: Your Pocket Guide to Chinese Business, Customs, and Etiquette*. San Rafael, CA: World Trade Press, 1996.
- March, Robert M. *Working for a Japanese Company: Insight into the Multicultural Workplace*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1992.
- McKinniss, Candace B., and Arthur Natella, Jr. *Business in Mexico: Managerial Behavior, Protocol, and Etiquette*. New York: Haworth, 1994.
- Moran, Robert T., and Jeffrey Abbott, NAFTA: *Managing the Cultural Differences*. Houston, TX: Gulf, 1994.
- Morrison, Terri, Wayne A. Conaway, and George A. Borden. *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: How to Do Business in 60 Countries*. Holbrook, MA: B. Adams, 1994.
- O'Hara-Devereaux, Mary, and Robert Johansen *Globalwork: Bridging Distance, Culture, and Time*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.
- Pinelli, Thomas E. *A Comparison of the Technical Communication Practices of Japanese and U.S. Aerospace Engineers and Scientists*. Washington, DC: American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, NASA. Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, 1996. NAS 1.15.111924.
- Trompenaars, Fons, and Charles Hampden-Turner. *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. 2d ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998.

EXERCISES

1. The U.S. government publishes a series of books on individual countries and marketing strategies for each country. Over 200 reports are available on 200 different countries. Over 100 are recent. Some examples include:

Holen, Leslie, and Elena Mikalis. *Marketing in France*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 1989.

Lyons, Maryanne B., and Maria H. Rauhala. *Marketing in Iceland*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 1991.

Marketing in India. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 1990.

McLaughlin, Robert. *Marketing in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 1990.

McQueen, Cheryl. *Marketing in Pakistan*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 1992.

Write a report, choosing two or three countries from the books in this series available in your library. Explain the differences in marketing strategy among the countries you choose to investigate.

2. Another series published by various branches of the U.S. government, and available from the Government Printing Office in Washington, DC, focuses on important aspects of individual countries. For example:

Hudson, Rex, ed. A. *Chile: A Country Study*. 3d ed. Washington, DC:

Worden, Robert L., Andrea Matles Savada, and Ronald E. Dolan, eds., 1994. *China: A Country Study*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1988.

Heitzman, James, and Robert L. Worden. *India: A Country Study*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1996.

Metz, Helen Chapin, ed. *Iraq: A Country Study*. 4th ed. Federal Research Division, Library of Congress 4th ed., 1990. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1990.

Shinn, Rinn S., ed. *Italy, a Country Study*. 2d ed. Foreign Area Studies, the American University. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1987.

Watkins, Chandra D. *Marketing in Kenya*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade, 1992.

Chose two or three different books in this series. Books are available on over 100 different countries. Write a report comparing and contrasting these countries in major categories of your choice.

Collaborative Projects

1. Prepare a written report on the challenges associated with doing business in a specific country. Focus your report on issues such as the following: management styles, corporate culture, negotiation style, social values, economics, and political systems. Allow each team member to choose and focus on one issue. After each person has completed research, come together as group. Decide how you will prepare each segment in the written report. Prepare each segment, then make copies of the segment for each team member. Following discussion of each team member's findings, write, as a team, a summary of the findings.

The following works provide useful, more advanced information on culture and its effects on business, economics, and politics than the general guides to doing business in various countries:

Caroll, Raymond. *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French–American Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988.

Child, John. *Management in China during the Age of Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Clegg, Stewart, and S. Gordon Redding. *Capitalism in Contrasting Cultures*. New York: de Gruyter, 1990.

Curry, Jeffrey. *A Short Course in International Negotiating: Planning and Conducting International Commercial Negotiations*. San Raphael, CA; World Trade Press, 1999.

Durlabhji, Subhash, and Norton E. Marks, eds. *Japanese Business: Cultural Perspectives*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

Kline, John M. *Foreign Investment Strategies in Restructuring Economies: Learning from Corporate Experience in Chile*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1992.

Jain, Subhash C. *Market Evolution in Developing Countries: The Unfolding of the Indian Market*. New York: International Business Press, 1993.

Kato, Hiroki, and Joan S. Kato. *Understanding and Working with the Japanese Business World*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

Maccoby, Michael, ed. *Sweden at the Edge: Lessons for American and Swedish Managers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Saik, Yasutaka. *The Eight Core Values of the Japanese Businessman: Toward an Understanding of Japanese Management*. Binghamton, NY: International Business Press, 1999.

Simons, George F., Carmen Vázquez, and Philip R. Harris. *Transcultural Leadership: Empowering the Diverse Workforce*. TX, Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1993.

Soufi, Wahib Abdulfattah, and Richard T. Mayer. *Saudi Arabian Industrial Investment: An Analysis of Government–Business Relationships*. New York: Quorum Books, 1991.

Wilson, Peter W., and Douglas F. Graham. *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994.

Whitley, Richard. *Business Systems in East Asia: Firms, Markets, and Societies*. London: Newbury Park; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1992.

Divergent Capitalisms: The Social Structuring and Change of Business Systems. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

FIGURE 7-1 • U.S. Business Letter

FIGURE 7-2 • Scheme of U.S. Business Letter

FIGURE 7-3 • Pakistani Business Letter

FIGURE 7-4 • Scheme of Pakistani Business Letter

FIGURE 7-5 • Mexican Business Letter

FIGURE 7-6 • Scheme of Mexican Business Letter

FIGURE 7-7 • Request to a Japanese Engineer

FIGURE 7-8 • Examples of Graphics Using Arrows

FIGURE 7-9 • Examples of Internationally Recognized Graphics: (a) airport; (b) fragile; (c) keep dry; (d) bar; and (e) hotel