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Dialogue & Society: Cross-Cultural Communication

Corporate Inclusion Institute

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June 5, 2026

Chicago United



Overview of Agenda

- **Overview (10 min)**

- Session Overview
- Learning Outcomes
- Introductions

- **Concepts (25 min)**

- Overview of Communication & Culture
- Mastering Verbal & Nonverbal Communication
- Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict
- Neuroscience in Cross-Cultural Dialogue
- Leading with Cross-Cultural Intelligence

- **Practical Application (40 min)**

- Case Study: *Lost in Translation at Helix Diagnostics*
- Case Study: *Mind the Gap at Brandt & Vargas Advertising Agency*
- 7 Best Practices to lead Cross-Culturally

- **Continuing Education (5 min)**

- Helpful Literature and Podcasts

- **Open Discussion (10 min)**

- Q&A



Session Overview

In this interactive dialogue, Dialogue & Society: Cross-Cultural Communication, participants will gain a deepened understanding of communication, culture and cross-cultural intelligence.



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Session Benefit

Through impactful communication, you will leave the session empowered to activate change across the business, your role and in client relationships.

Session Learning Outcomes

- ❑ **Explore** the relationship between language, culture and the uniqueness of human connectivity and communication.
- ❑ **Gain** understanding of verbal and nonverbal communication to create workplace belonging.
- ❑ **Champion** your impact and influence on your people, clients, the business, the bottom line and beyond, to become informed and empowered.



Engagement During Presentation

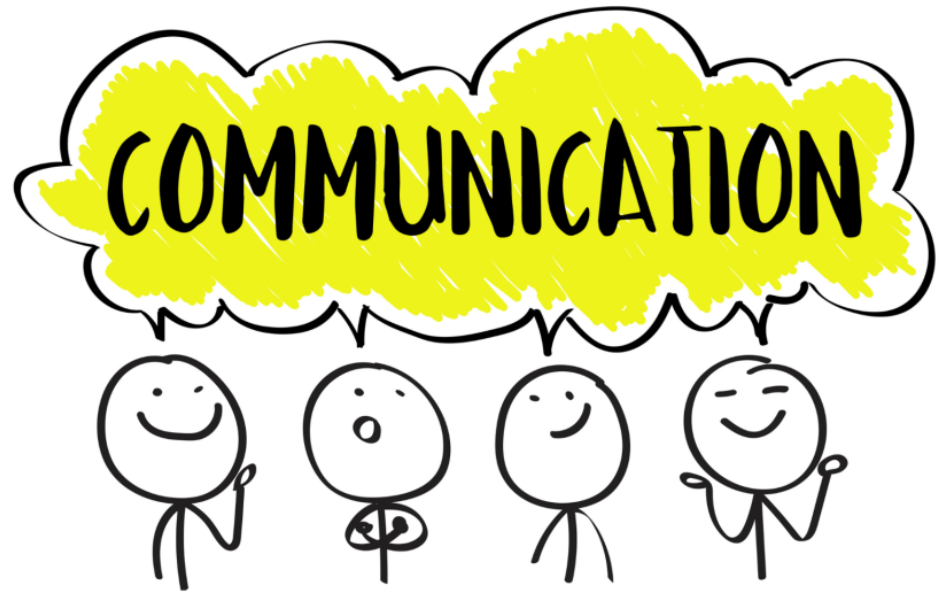
If you have a question, feel free to raise a hand to be acknowledged.





Introductions

Name, Organization, Years in Corporate Sector
Leadership Challenge

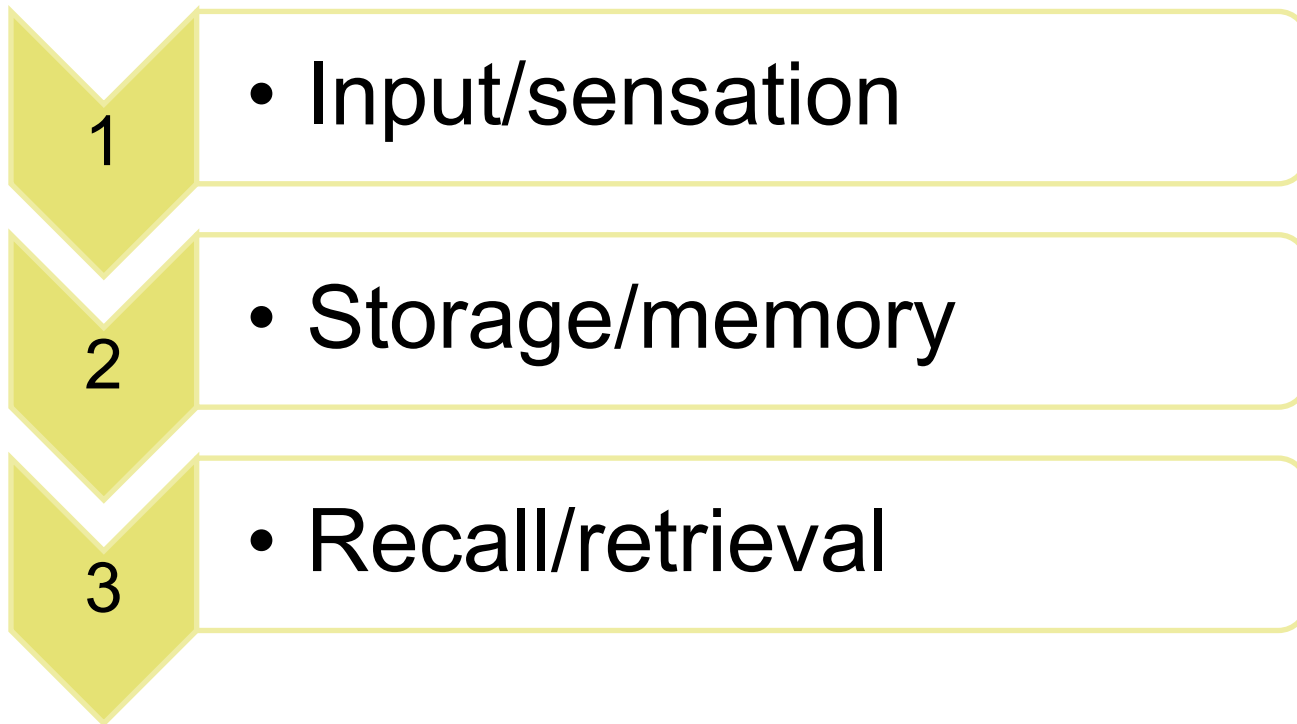


Human Communication

Communication

- Difficult to define...
 - process
 - active/forceful dynamics
 - representative symbols
 - context
- Ubiquitous, dynamic, interactive process of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal messages within a defined cultural, physiological, relational and perceptual context.

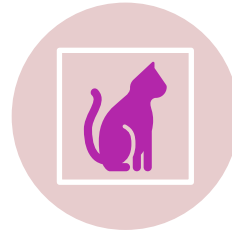
Model of Human Information Processing



Human Interaction



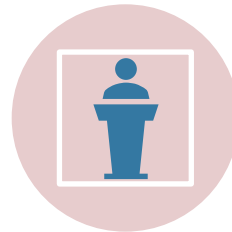
Ability to symbolize and use language



Separates humans from animals



A vehicle by which people initiate, maintain, and terminate their relationships with others



Influence and persuade others



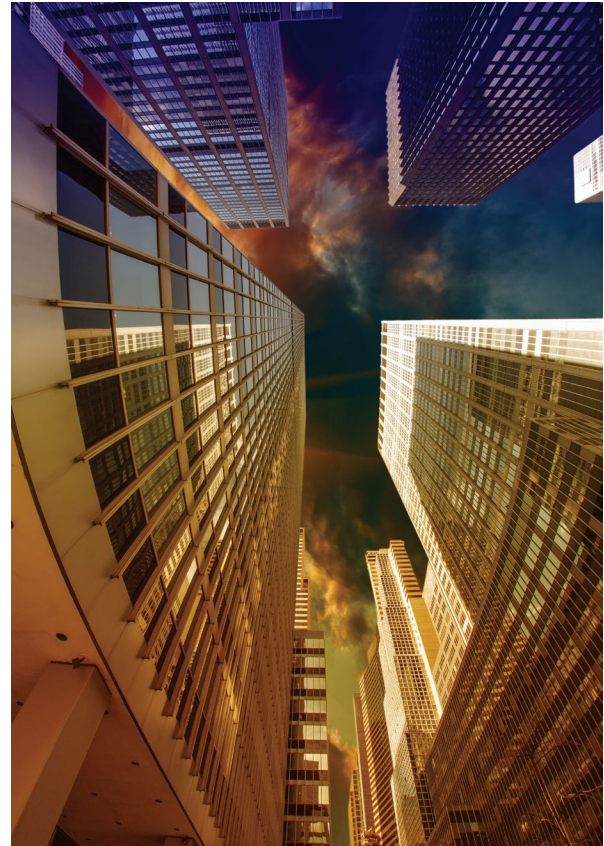


Inspired by Intercultural Communication

Cross-Cultural Communication

Our Intercultural Lives

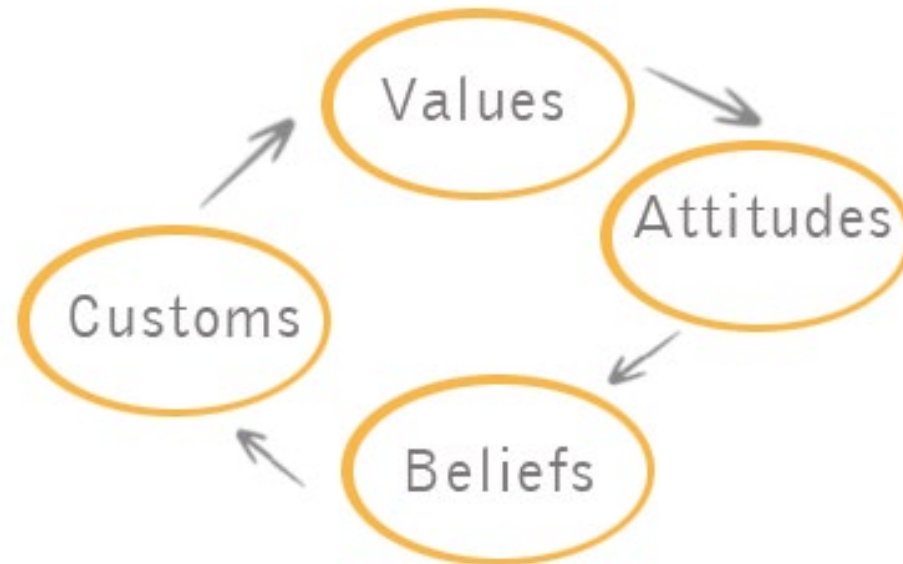
- How does intercultural communication pervade your life?



What's in a culture?



Culture



Cultural Contexts

- People are born into a culture.
 - This is not innate.
- Culture:
 - Is learned, group-related perceptions (Hall, 1992).
 - Teaches one how to think.
 - Conditions one how to feel.
 - A collective experience.
 - Patterns instructs one's behavior: how to act and interact with others.

Culture

- The people, more than the geography, are what constitute culture.
- Cultures change they are fluid, always moving.
- Cultural Variability
 - Five Dimensions
 - Individualism vs. Collectivism
 - High-Low Context
 - Value Orientations
 - Power Distance
 - Uncertainty Avoidance

Intercultural Communication

- Communication between people of different cultures and ethnicities:
 - **Origination:** Edward T. Hall (1959), *The Silent Language*
 - **Occurs:** Whenever two or more people from different cultures come together and exchange verbal and nonverbal messages.
 - **Franz Boas**, “cultural relativism”
 - Humans are inherently ethnocentric (i.e., one’s native culture is the standard by which other cultures are observed and judged).
 - **Intersectionality**
 - Anna Cooper, Ph.D.
 - Kimberle Crenshaw, Ph.D.

Why this matters?

- We live in a world that's constantly changing.
- Culture
 - Profound effects on humans
 - Accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal/nonverbal symbol systems.
 - Physically, Relationship based, Microcultural (i.e., smaller subset of larger or mainstream group), Perceptual disposition (i.e., attitudes, motivations and emotions)

Most carry both individualistic and collectivistic tendencies to some degree

Individualism

- United States: Montana, Oregon and Nebraska'
- Germany
- India
- Lebanon

No culture is purely individualistic or collectivistic

Collectivism

- United States: Hawaii, Louisiana, South Carolina
- Japan
- Korea
- Nigeria

High & Low Context Communication

High

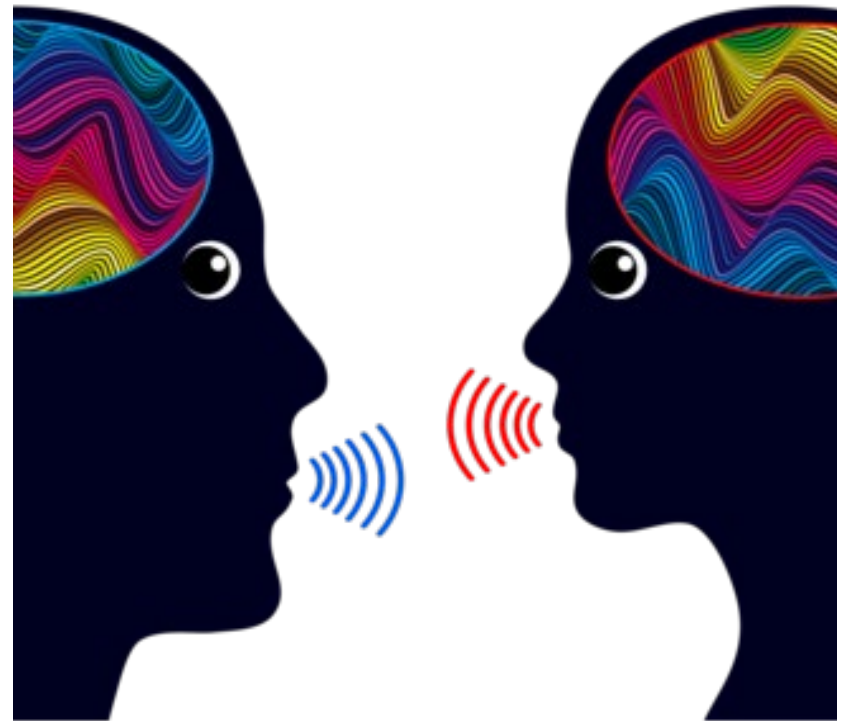
- Message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or is internalized in the person
- Very little is coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.
- The interactants know each other and their appropriate roles, words are not necessary to convey meaning.

Low

- Messages are vested in the explicit code, or verbal code.
- Reliance on elaborated codes, through verbal communication
- A need to speak in order to communicate.

Communication Apprehension

- Developed by Jim McCroskey, believed everyone experienced some sense of “communication apprehension”...
 - Fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or group of persons.
 - Categorization: traitlike, context, audience and situational
 - Additional Tenants
 - »Categorization reduces uncertainty and increases accuracy of predictions about others
 - »Ethnocentric attributional bias



Benefits of Intercultural Communication



HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES ~ LEARN
TO ACCEPT AND VALUE
DIFFERENCES



INCREASED COMMERCE
~ COMMUNICATION
ACROSS BORDERS



REDUCED CONFLICT ~
REDUCE AND MANAGE



PERSONAL GROWTH
THROUGH TOLERANCE ~
ALTHOUGH CULTURES
DIFFER, SIMILARITIES
CAN BE FOUND AND
EMBRACED



How the Brain Shapes Understanding Across Cultures

Neuroscience in Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Why neuroscience matters in culture?

- Cross-cultural communication is shaped by how people notice cues, assign meaning, and respond emotionally.
- Neuroscience helps explain why the same message may be interpreted differently across cultures.
- This matters in classrooms, workplaces, healthcare, and international collaboration.



Cultural neuroscience basics

- Cultural neuroscience examines the bidirectional relationship between culture and the brain.
- Cultural values and practices can influence:
 - Cognition
 - Emotion
 - Behavior
- Helps explain differences in attention, visual perception, and self-versus-group orientation.

The brain reacts to workplace communication through systems involved in **threat detection, reward, emotion regulation, and social belonging.**

Empathy and the Brain

- Empathy is supported by neural systems involved in emotion, self-awareness, and pain processing.
 - The insula and anterior cingulate cortex are commonly associated with responses to others' distress.
- Strong empathy is helpful, but it can be uneven across cultural boundaries.

In-group and out-group effects

- People often show stronger neural and emotional responses to members of their own group than to outsiders.
 - Reduce perspective taking
 - Increase misinterpretation in cross-cultural exchanges
- Cultural symbols and unfamiliar norms can also trigger discomfort or defensiveness.

Neuroinformed leadership doesn't replace organizational theory, it explains **why people react strongly** to social cues, and helps leaders **structure conversations** that build psychological safety.

Case Study:

Mind the Gap at Brandt & Vargas Advertising Agency
Communication Styles, Team Harmony, and Paradoxical
Leadership

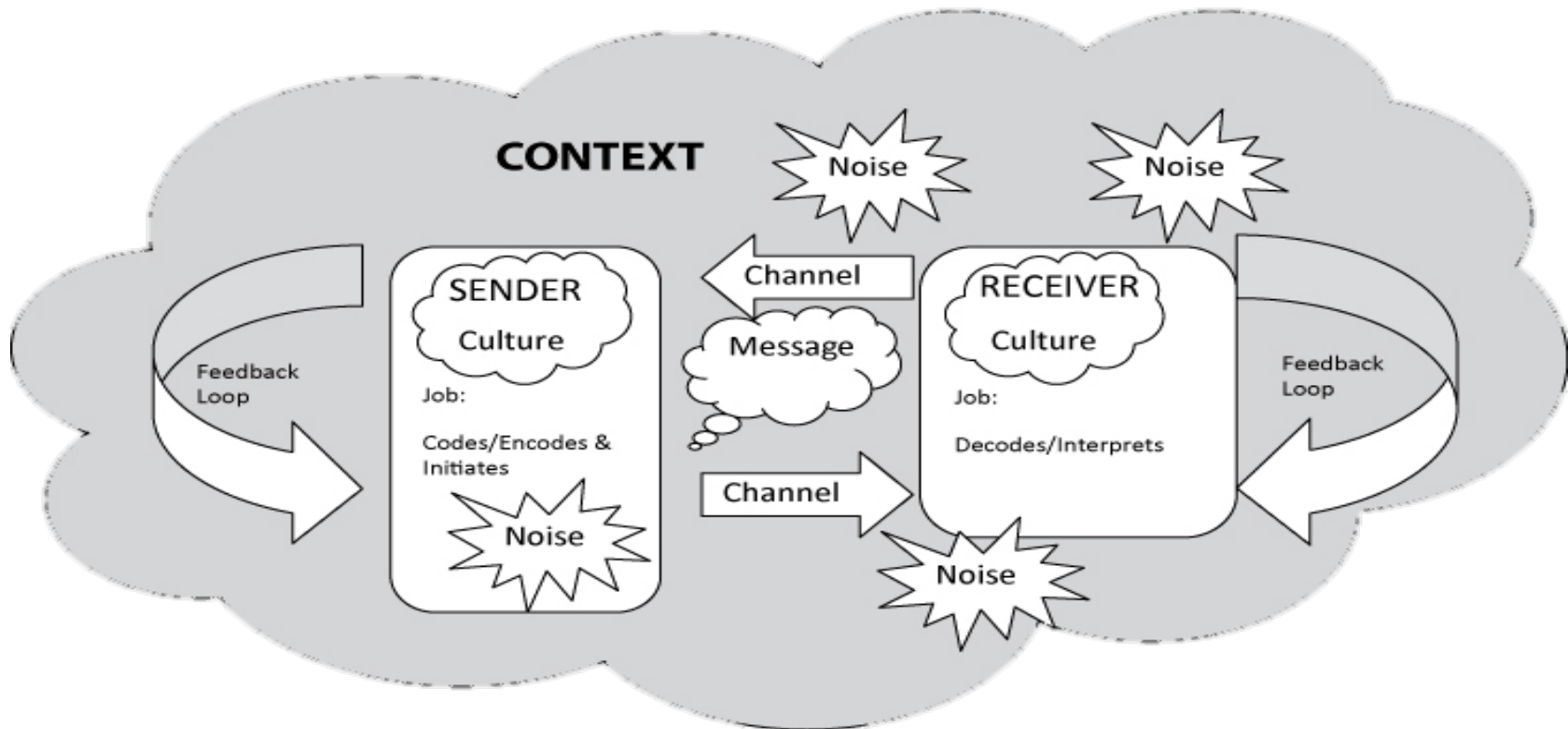
See handout



Why this discussion matters?

Verbal vs. Nonverbal

Traditional Communications Model



Language is a central element in intercultural communication, whether face-to-face or online.

Languages spoken in the world today = Approximately 7k+

Direct vs. Indirect Styles

- *Direct Communication Style*
 - Verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires.
- *Indirect Communication Style*
 - Verbal message is often designed to camouflage the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988).

Ex: Direct and Indirect Styles

•Direct Style

–*Overt expressions of intention*

- Assert self-face needs
- Examples: U.S., England, Germany, Israel

•Indirect Style

- Speakers intents are hidden or only hinted at in interaction*
- Prevents face threats to either speaker
- Examples: Japan and France

Relationship Between Communication & Culture

- Interrelated and reciprocal.
- Dialectical.
- Communication influences Culture AND Culture influences Communication.
- If communication is about sharing meaning and reality, then culture influences what we believe to be “real”.

Comparing Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- Both verbal and nonverbal communication are:
 - Symbolic
 - Communicate meaning
 - Patterned (governed by contextually determined rules)
- Societies have different nonverbal languages, just as they have different spoken languages.
- In cross-cultural settings, a pause may signal thoughtfulness, discomfort, respect, or disagreement depending on the context.
 - Leaders should create shared communication norms rather than expecting a single dominant style to fit everyone.
- Generally, nonverbal behaviors reinforce verbal behaviors.

Relationship Between Verbal & Nonverbal Codes

- *Verbal Language is based on Symbols*
 - Symbols are arbitrarily selected and learned stimuli representing something else
 - Ex: Elaborate vs. Understand Styles
 - Slang & Humor
- *Nonverbal System is based on Signals*
 - Signals are natural and constituent parts of that which it represents
 - Positioning and proximity

“Where we come from is important to who we are” ~ John Preston, 1991 (p. xi).

Nonverbal & Cultural Space

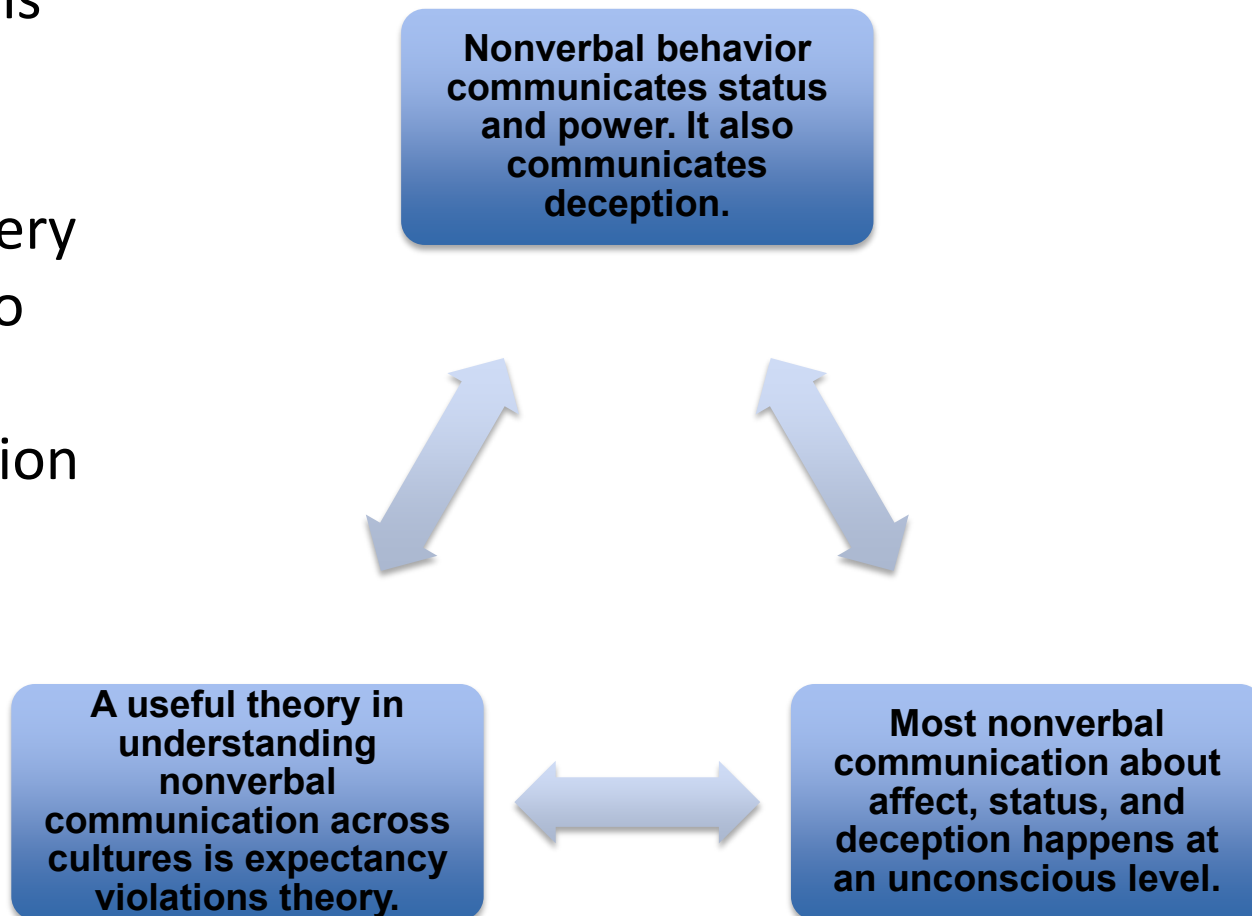
Thinking Dialectically & Defining: Nonverbal Communication

There are two forms of communication beyond speech.

- The **first** includes facial expression, personal space, gestures, eye contact, paralanguage, use of time, and conversational silence.
 - The **second** includes the cultural spaces that people occupy and negotiate.
- **Cultural spaces** are the social and cultural contexts in which people's identity forms, where they grow up and where they live.

What Nonverbal Behavior Communicates

- Although language is an effective and efficient means of communicating, every communication also conveys **relational messages** information on how the talker wants to be understood and viewed by the listener.



Facial Expressions

- Many cross-cultural studies support the notion of some universality in nonverbal communication, particularly in **facial expressions**.
- Several facial gestures seem to be universal, including:
 - Eyebrow flash, or contact
 - Nose wrinkle
 - The “disgust face”
- The evoking stimuli (i.e., what causes the nonverbal behavior) may vary from one culture to another.

Nonverbal Codes

- Physical appearance is an important nonverbal code.
 - Height, weight, and body shape, body hair, clothing choices, and personal artifacts such jewelry, glasses, and backpacks/briefcases/purses.
- Psychologist **Paul Ekman**
 - Most notable of 60+ years of research, studying emotions and their relation to facial expressions.
 - Maintained there are six basic emotions expressed through universal facial expressions: happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise, anger, and fear.

Universal Expressions

EXPRESSION	MOTION CUES
Happiness	raising and lowering of mouth corners
Sadness	lowering of mouth corners raise inner portion of brows
Surprise	brows arch eyes open wide to expose more white jaw drops slightly
Fear	brows raised eyes open mouth opens slightly
Disgust	upper lip is raised nose bridge is wrinkled cheeks raised
Anger	brows lowered lips pressed firmly eyes bulging

Summation

- Slang
 - Often uses metaphors
 - Generational slang is common
- Humor
 - What's funny to me might be offensive to you
- Globalization
 - People have a better understanding of other cultures if they speak their language
 - English is still the preferred language for business and diplomacy
- Language Politics
 - Nations can enact laws recognizing an official language, such as French in France or Irish in Ireland
 - Some nations have multiple official languages.



And...everywhere

Conflict is inevitable

Defining Cross-Cultural Conflict

The real or perceived incompatibility...

of values, norms, expectations, goals, processes or outcomes...

between two or more interdependent individuals or groups

Conflictive Happenings

- Conflicts are happening all around the world, as they always have, and at many different levels:
 - Interpersonal
 - Social
 - National
 - International
- Intergenerational conflicts can occur in the workplace.
- Conflicts can also happen on a societal level.
- Media and pop culture

Micro/Meso/Macro Intercultural Conflict Theories

- Micro Frame:
 - Focus is on interpersonal interaction
 - Focus is on cultural orientations to conflict
- Meso Frame:
 - Focus is on group prejudices, cultural histories, and identities
- Macro Frame:
 - Focus is on media, discourse, political and economic factors

Communication Approaches to Conflict

Direct

- Conflict is fundamentally a good thing.
- Precise language.
- Goal is to articulate differences clearly and arrive at “best” solution.

Indirect

- Conflict is ultimately destructive.
- Framed as “*disturbing the peace.*”
- Threat to interpersonal and community harmony.
- Adhere to the consensus of the group, rather than engage in conflict.

Emotional Approaches to Conflict

Expressiveness

- Show emotion during conflict.
- Do not hide or suppress feelings.
- Outward display of emotions means concern about the result.

Restraint

- Discuss conflicts in an emotionally calm manner.
- Control and internalize feelings.
- Avoid non-verbal expressions of emotion.

Intercultural Conflict Styles

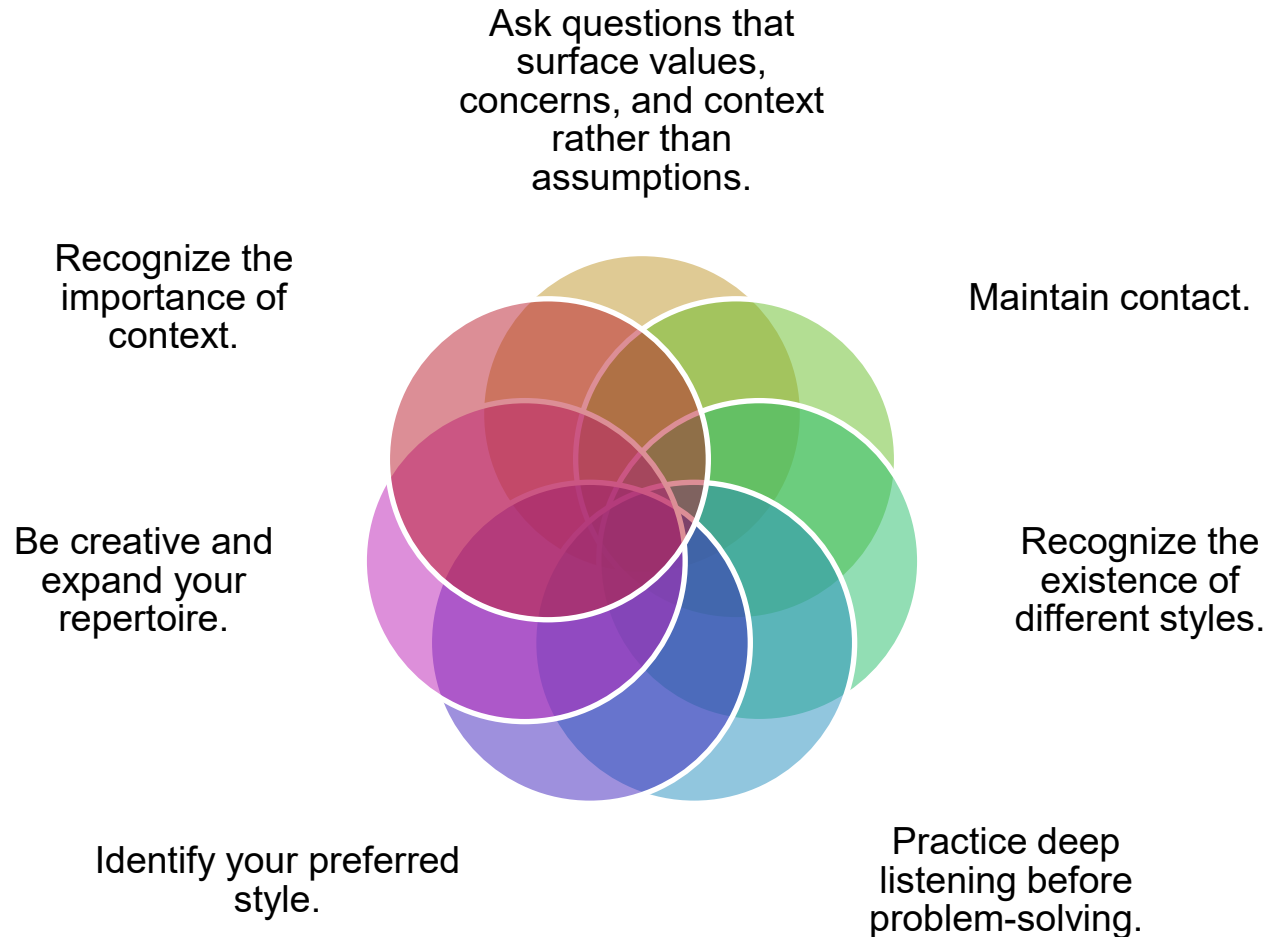
- **Discussion Style:** Direct and Restrained
 - White Americans, Europeans, New Zealanders, Australians
- **Engagement Style:** Direct and Expressive
 - Black Americans, Southern Europeans, Russia, Israel
- **Accommodating Style:** Indirect and Restrained
 - American Indians, Latin Americans, Asians
- **Dynamic Style:** Indirect and Expressive
 - Middle East

Warning: *Nothing is Universal*

- Regions may have been homogeneous or isolated from other cultures.
- Colonization influences.
- Immigration history of the ethnic group.
- Assumptions
- Stereotype

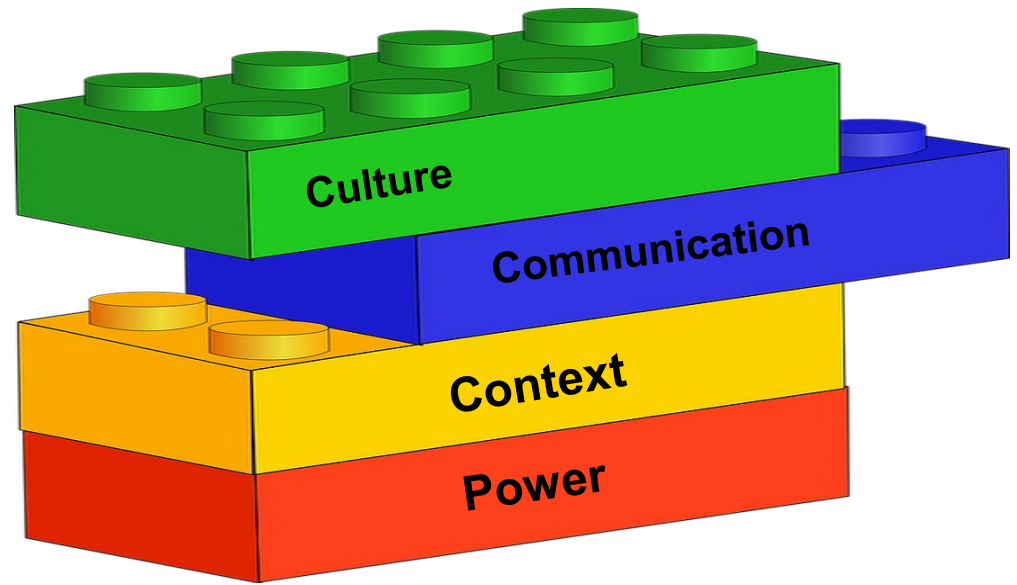


Building Intercultural Skills



Case Study:
Lost in Translation at Helix Diagnostics
Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict

See handout



Interrelated and reciprocal communication

Leading with Cross-Cultural Intelligence

Knowledge

- **Self-knowledge**

- Knowing how one may be perceived as a communicator and what one's strengths and weaknesses are.

- **Other-knowledge**

- Knowledge about how other people think and behave, will also help individuals be a more effective communicator.

- **Linguistic knowledge**

- Learning a second or third language can be difficult and even when we know another language, we may not feel competent in it.

Cosmopolitan Competence (CC)

A comprehensive approach to competence.

- CC emphasizes many of the elements that has already been described: empathy, openness, compassion, mutuality, and also stresses the role of power differentials.
- The way to work through these challenges is by the ***process of dialogue and action*** in joining with others to address historically and newly emerging power inequities



Putting it All Together: *Leadership Implications*

Leaders create more effective teams when they combine cultural humility, emotional regulation, and neuroscience-informed communication routines.



Cross-cultural leadership is most effective when the brain, emotions, and relationships are treated as part of the same system.



7 Best Practices

Leading Cross-Culturally through Communication



Reinforce Relational Intelligence

Build trust, read relational cues and create shared meaning across differences.





Emotional intelligence as the bridge

Self-awareness helps leaders notice bias, defensiveness, and overconfidence in cross-cultural interactions.





• Harmonious Discourse

- Voice for *all* interactants.
- There are two options for those who feel left out: exit or expression.
- When people feel excluded, they often simply shut down, physically or mentally abandoning the conversation.
- Sharing
- Reciprocity
- Listening



Whole-Brain Creativity

**Goals Driven:
Analytical
Intelligence**



**Vision Driven:
Creative
Intelligence**

**Results Driven:
Operational
Intelligence**

**People Driven:
Relational
Intelligence**

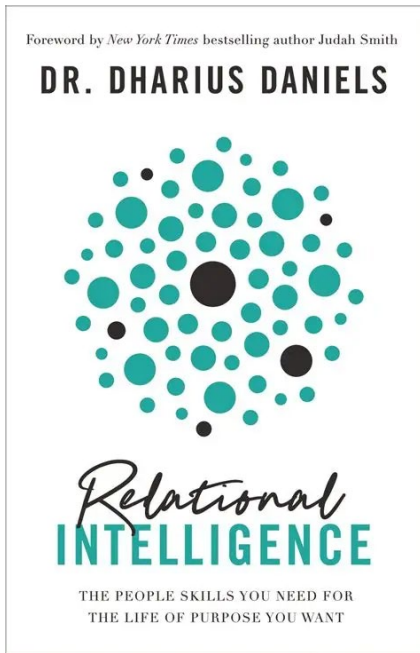
Adapted from Ned Herrmann © CreativityatWork.com



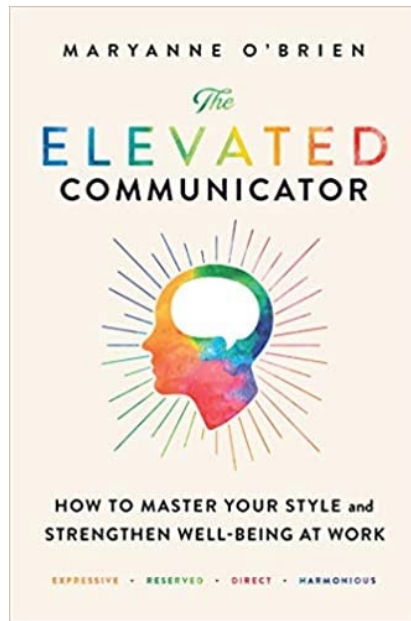
Literature & Podcasts

Helpful books and podcasts to engage with as you continue your learning journey.

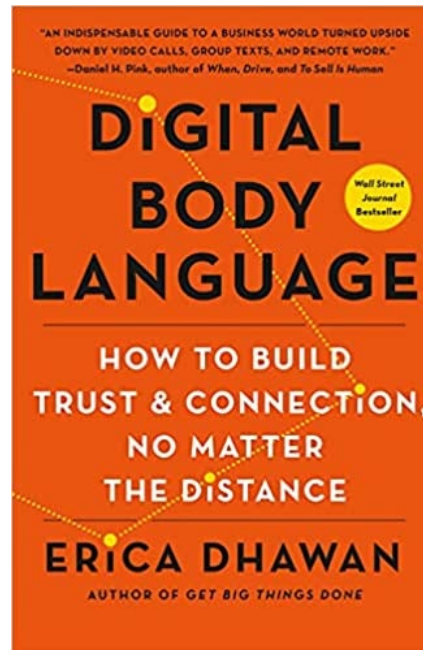
Literature Resources



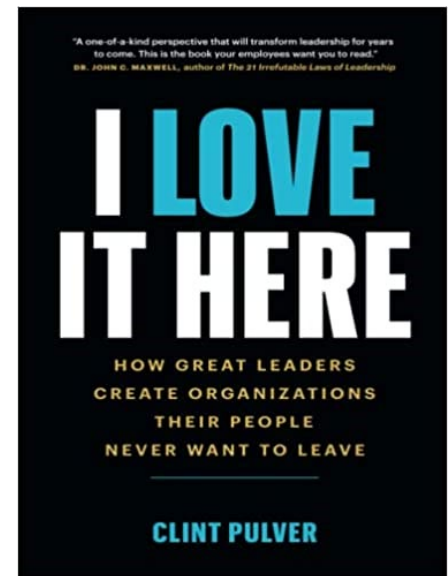
Daniels
(2020)



O' Brien
(2021)



Dhawan
(2021)



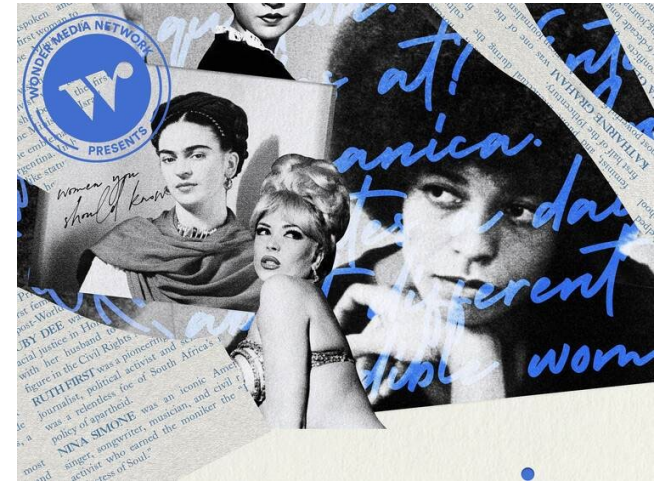
Pulver
(2021)

Podcasts to Acknowledge



We Are Family
Podcast by
Parents
Magazine

Xceptional
Leaders with
Mai Ling Chan



Encyclopaedia
Womannica



Questions or Comments?

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Connecting the Dots

Key take-away messages:

- Communication is hard — extend grace to others and to yourself as you navigate difference
- Human beings are complex; effective communicators adapt their style to meet each person where they are, considering culture, background, and lived experience
- Psychological safety is foundational — when people feel seen and respected, authentic communication follows
- Cross-cultural communication is an expression of emotional intelligence, not separate from it; understanding difference is central to how we relate to one another
- As AI grows in the workplace, our distinctly human capacity to connect across difference becomes more valuable — it cannot be replicated by technology

Large Group Discussion

Building blocks: Challenges in cross-cultural communication:

- In global organizations, geographic regions do not always align with a central vision — how work gets done varies, and bridging that gap requires intentional strategy
- Generational alignment – generational differences present real communication challenges in the workplace, particularly around the introduction of technology and the varying expectations each generation brings
- Different departments operate as their own subcultures, each with distinct priorities — effective cross-cultural communicators learn to bridge those differences and find common ground that serves the whole
- Job shadowing is a practical tool for building cross-departmental understanding, fostering empathy, surfacing opportunities for improvement, and driving innovation

Wrap-up and next steps

Submit survey responses

Schedule monthly coaching meetings with your coaching partner

Look for opportunities to apply principles from today's session in your day-to-day

Connect with your coaching partner and ask about ways they can apply or have applied the session principles

Next session: Friday, July 10, 2026, Subtleties of Inclusion and Exclusion



Podcast

Intersectionality Matters!

African American Policy Forum

THANK YOU