

To further illustrate the misunderstandings that can occur when we communicate with strangers, consider the following example that involves a segment of interaction between a supervisor from the United States and a subordinate from Greece. In the segment, the supervisor wants the employee to participate in decisions (a norm in the United States), while the subordinate expects to be told what to do (a norm in Greece):

Behavior

[U.S.] American: How long will it take you to finish this report?

Greek: I do not know.
How long should it take?

Attribution

[U.S.] American: I asked him to participate.

Greek: His behavior makes no sense. He is the boss. Why doesn't he tell me?

[U.S.] American: He refuses to take responsibility.

Greek: I asked him for an order.

[U.S.] American: You are in the best position to analyze time requirements.

Greek: 10 days.

[U.S.] American: Take 15. It is agreed you will do it in 15 days?

[U.S.] American: I press him to take responsibility for his own actions.

Greek: What nonsense! I better give him an answer.

[U.S.] American: He lacks the ability to estimate time; this estimate is totally inadequate.

[U.S.] American: I offer a contract.

Greek: These are my orders.

In fact the report needed 30 days of regular work. So the Greek worked day and night, but at the end of the 15th day, he still needed one more day's work.

[U.S.] American: Where is my report?

[U.S.] American: I am making sure he fulfills his contract.

Greek: He is asking for the report.

Greek: It will be ready tomorrow. (Both attribute that it is not ready.)

[U.S.] American: But we agreed it would be ready today.

[U.S.] American: I must teach him to fulfill a contract.

Greek: The stupid, incompetent boss! Not only did he give me wrong orders, but he does not appreciate that I did a 30-day job in 16 days.

The Greek hands in his resignation.

The [U.S.] American is surprised.

Greek: I can't work for such a man. (Triandis, 1975, pp. 42-43)

Clearly, the Greek and the U.S. American are attributing different meanings to the same behavior.

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