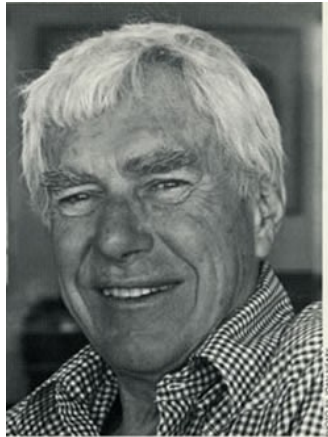INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Supplementary Readings 1: A summary of E.T.Hall's concepts

Edward Hall (1914-2009)

Hall's cultural factors

Edward T. Hall was an anthropologist at the University of New Mexico who formulated key cultural factors and can be considered as one of the pioneers of cross-cultural studies.. In particular he is known for his high and low context cultural concepts.

Context

High context

In a high-context culture, there are many contextual elements that help people to understand the rules. As a result, much is taken for granted. This can be very confusing for a person who does not understand the 'unwritten rules' of the culture.

Low context

In a low-context culture, very little is taken for granted. Whilst this means that more explanation is needed, it also means there is less chance of misunderstanding particularly when visitors are present.

Contrasting the two

French legal contracts tend to be short (in physical length, not time duration) as much of the information is available within the high-context French culture. American culture, on the other hand, is low-context and so contracts tend to be longer in order to explain the detail.

Highly mobile environments where people come and go, such as the USA, need lower-context culture in order to avoid constant misunderstanding. Cultures with a stable population, however, may develop a higher context culture, e.g. Japan which was isolated from foreign influence until after WWII.

Factor	High-context culture	Low-context culture
Overtness of messages	Many covert and implicit messages, with use of metaphor and reading between the lines.	Many overt and explicit messages that are simple and clear.
Locus of control and attribution for failure	Inner locus of control and personal acceptance for failure	Outer locus of control and blame of others for failure
Use of non-verbal communication	Much nonverbal communication	More focus on verbal communication than body language
Expression of reaction	Reserved, inward reactions	Visible, external, outward reaction
Cohesion and separation of groups	Strong distinction between "in-group" and "out-group". Strong sense of family.	Flexible and open grouping patterns, changing as needed
People bonds	Strong people bonds with affiliation to family and community	Fragile bonds between people with little sense of loyalty.
Level of commitment to relationships	High commitment to long-term relationships. Relationship more important than task.	Low commitment to relationship. Task more important than relationships.
Flexibility of time	Time is open and flexible. Process is more important than product	Time is highly organized. Product is more important than process

Time

Monochronic time

M-Time, as he called it, means doing one thing at a time. It assumes careful planning and scheduling and is a familiar Western approach that appears in disciplines such as 'time management' and many aspects of Project Management, e.g. the Gantt chart

Monochronic people tend also to be low context.

Polychronic time

In Polychronic cultures, human interaction is valued over time and material things, leading to a lesser concern for 'getting things done' -- they do get done, but more in their own time.

Aboriginal and Native Americans have typical polychronic cultures, where 'talking stick' meetings can go on for as long as somebody has something to say.

Polychronic people tend also to be high context.

Contrasting the two

Western cultures vary in their focus on monochronic or polychronic time. Americans and Germans are strongly monochronic whilst the French have a much greater polychronic tendency -- thus a French person may turn up to a meeting late and think nothing of it (much to the annoyance of a German or American co-worker).

Factor	Monochronic action	Polychronic action
Actions	do one thing at a time	do many things at once
Focus	Concentrate on the job at hand	Are easily distracted
Attention to time	Think about when things must be achieved	Think about what will be achieved
Priority	Put the job first	Put relationships first
Respect for property	Seldom borrow or lend things	Borrow and lend things often and easily
Timeliness	Emphasize promptness	base promptness relationship factors

Space

Hall was also concerned about space and our relationships within it. He called the study of such space, *Proxemics*.

We have concerns about space in many situations, from personal body space to space in the office, parking space, space at home.

The need for space

Some people need more space in all areas. People who encroach into that space are seen as a threat.

Personal space is an example of a mobile form of territory and people need less or greater distances between them and others. A "Mediterranean" person who needs less space thus will stand closer to an American, inadvertently making the American uncomfortable.

Some people need bigger homes, bigger cars, bigger offices and so on. This may be driven by cultural factors, for example the physical space in America leads to a greater need for space, whilst Japanese need less space (partly as a result of limited available space in Japan).

As an example, check comments made by American tourists about European, especially French, hotels on www.booking.com – very often they are complaints about space.

High territoriality

Some people are more territorial than others with greater concern for ownership. They seek to mark out the areas which are theirs and perhaps having boundary wars with neighbors. This happens right down to desk-level, where co-workers may do battle over a piece of paper which overlaps from one person's area to another. At national level, many wars have been fought over boundaries. Territoriality also extends to anything that is 'mine' and ownership concerns extend to material things. Security thus becomes a subject of great concern for people with a high need for ownership.

People with high territoriality tend also to be low context.

Low territoriality

People with lower territoriality have less ownership of space and boundaries are less important to them. They will share territory and ownership with little thought. They also have less concern for material ownership and their sense of 'stealing' is less developed (this is more important for highly territorial people).

People with low territoriality tend also to be high context.

Contrasting

Australian Aboriginal people will say that they belong to the land rather than the other way around, and we should remember that they have thrived in harsh conditions for thousands of years! Western society, on the other hand has shown much barbarity over ownership of land.

Closer to home, look at the way people occupy space on the RER. "Europeans" will always try to find a seat where no-one else is sitting next to them or opposite them. Non-Europeans, on the other hand, may prefer to have people around them

So what?

When working across cultures, pay attention to cultural cotext through the actions of others. For example if people are late for meetings it may be because they are polychronic, not because they are disrespectful or lazy. Similarly, if you are polychromic remember to try to be on time in a monochronic environment.

When you understand the personal, national or organizational culture, then you can seek to align with them and hence have more effective communication and gain greater influence.

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Source: Adapted from: http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall_culture.htm, Webpage on Hall's cultural factors