



Variables Influencing Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication: when a member of one culture sends a message to a member of another culture. Culture not only dictates how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Our entire set of communicative behaviors is dependent largely on the culture in which we have been raised. And when cultures vary, communication practices also vary.

Type	Cultural Impacts	Example of Cultural Implications
Nonverbal Communication	Behavior that communicates without words (such as eye contact, facial expressions, body posture) differs across cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal space zones vary Direct eye contact can be considered disrespectful Gestures vary widely across cultures and can be misinterpreted
Time	The way people regard and use time is influenced by culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Western sense of time is logical, sequential, and present-focused. Other cultures may see time as less regimented
Language	Spoken or written language is a frequent cause of miscommunication, stemming from a person's inability to speak the local language, a poor or too-literal translation, or a person missing the subtext or certain symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-native English speakers face particular challenges when working in an English-speaking environment. Even in cultures that share the English language, the meaning of "yes" varies from "maybe, I'll consider it" to "definitely so," with many shades in between
Attitudes	Attitudes underlie the way we behave, communicate, and interpret messages from other people; our own attitudes can influence how we regard the behaviors of those from other cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different cultures have different expectations regarding appropriate levels of assertive behavior at work—what seems aggressive to some is acceptable to others Cultures differ in their regard to individual versus team work efforts—some may feel uncomfortable being singled out for their contribution
Role	Societies differ considerably in their perception of a Manager's or supervisor's role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the U.S. a Manager or supervisor may delegate decision-making responsibility for a particular matter to a subordinate. In other cultures, there is a strong value placed on holding decision-making responsibilities to oneself
Social Organization	Our perceptions can be influenced by differences in values, approach, or priorities relative to the kind of social organizations (e.g., Agency, job, or group) to which we belong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some cultures prioritize family obligations before work obligations while others place more emphasis on work
Thought Patterns	The logical progression of reasoning varies widely around the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some cultures are trained to think logically and present material in a linear framework; people from cultures that emphasize a more fluid or circular approach may experience frustration with the same framework