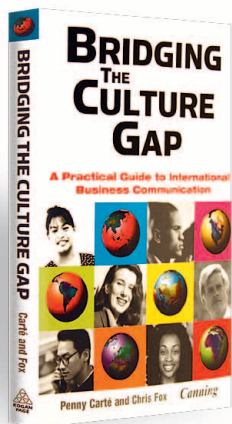


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: HANDS-ON MANAGEMENT



By Penny Carte
and Chris Fox

A Practical Guide to International Business Communication

BRIDGING THE CULTURE GAP

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

There are those who will tell you that globalization is creating an environment in which companies can operate virtually anywhere in the world under identical conditions to those back home. This is a dangerous belief. It leads people to assume that there is one norm, one way of doing things, one way of looking at the world. As globalization gathers momentum, contact between businesspeople from other countries is becoming more frequent. The more national boundaries a company crosses, the greater the scope for misunderstanding and conflict. To succeed internationally, it is essential to break the barriers of culture, language and set patterns of thinking.

Most of the time, communications break down because there is a culture gap of which neither side is aware, or because compatriots back home at the main office won't allow their managers in the field to adapt corporate policy to suit local needs.

Bridging the Culture Gap is based on the real-life business situations of the authors' many international clients. Featuring many case studies, cultural preference scales and practical tips, this summary will help those of any nationality to become better communicators. Whether you are planning to give a presentation to a cross-cultural group or about to negotiate with an overseas client, the advice found in this summary will help you ensure that your cultural-awareness antennae are well tuned.

CONTENTS

Bridging the Culture Gap

Page 2

Interpreting the Party Line

Pages 2, 3, 4

Knowing Your Place

Pages 4, 5

Knowing the Limits

Pages 5, 6

Knowing the Form

Pages 6, 7

Making Presentations

Pages 7, 8

Making Deals

Page 8

Knowing Yourself

Page 8

What You'll Learn In This Summary

- ✓ How to deal sensitively with those from other cultures.
- ✓ How to mind your manners when they matter most.
- ✓ How to avoid the hidden dangers of international negotiations.
- ✓ How to smoothly work your way through the international moral maze.
- ✓ How to communicate with style.
- ✓ How to win the deal.

BRIDGING THE CULTURE GAP

by Penny Carté and Chris Fox

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Bridging the Culture Gap

All of us carry around fixed images of other cultures. These stereotypes are often negative and nearly always the result of measuring what foreigners do or say against our own cultural norms.

For instance, a Swedish company had established very clear global purchasing guidelines: No more than 30 percent of any particular item could be supplied by one vendor, and quotes had to be obtained from at least three different suppliers.

Anders — the regional manager for Southeast Asia — was disturbed to note that, despite several reminders, the subsidiary in Vietnam did not appear to be following these guidelines. In fact, the range of suppliers it used seemed to be very limited, and most of them were Chinese.

The subsidiary's Chinese manager seemed very unconcerned when Anders raised this problem with him. "Well, of course most of our suppliers are Chinese," he said. "I only use vendors I'm related to."

Trust and Nepotism

When Anders explained that this practice would have to stop because it was unethical and anticompetitive, the Chinese manager was genuinely puzzled: "But I can't see what the problem is," he said. "My family is much more loyal and reliable than people I don't know. I can call them at any time of day or night. And, of course, they give me much better discounts. Surely you don't want me to use suppliers I don't trust."

Who do you identify with here: Anders, who was convinced that nepotism was unequivocally wrong, or the Chinese manager who regarded giving contracts to his family as a perfectly normal, logical and acceptable thing to do? If you were Anders, what would you do next? What impact do you think your instinctive response would be likely to have on the Chinese manager?

There are clearly a number of cultural differences that could affect the outcome of this situation. But what are they? What lies behind them? These are the kinds of questions this summary asks and then helps to answer by using a series of cultural preference scales, designed to help you gradually build up a picture of how your own culture differs from others and why. ■

Interpreting the Party Line

Customers, shareholders and the media soon lose faith and interest in a company that projects a confused or inconsistent image. This is why every business strives to present itself to the outside world as a united entity with a single set of beliefs. The trouble is, the bigger a company becomes and the more national borders it crosses, the harder it has to work to preserve the united front that is so vital to its continued prosperity.

The Central Norm

For many multinational companies, developing everything centrally — such as the messages they want to broadcast and the brands they market — is the only answer. This central norm is then disseminated throughout the organization. This can work if those at headquarters are prepared to adapt the party line to suit local needs, and if their colleagues in the foreign subsidiaries are willing to keep an open mind. All too often, however, everyone assumes that his or her own attitudes and beliefs are universal, right and normal. It doesn't occur to most people that those from other cultures might see things from a different perspective.

It's only natural to regard your own view of the world as the right one, and to believe that anyone who doesn't share it is strange or unusual. The people at the main office jump

(continued on page 3)

The authors: Since 1988, Penny Carté has served as director of research and development for the international communications training consultancy Canning. She has run many courses for multinational companies and written a wide range of cross-cultural, business training materials.

Chris Fox joined Canning in 1999, specializing in running courses for managers in the pharmaceutical, financial and aerospace sectors. He travels regularly throughout the world, liaising with client companies and delivering courses. He has published papers and articles on political and cultural theory.

Copyright © 2004 by Penny Carté and Chris Fox. Summarized by the permission of the publisher, Kogan Page USA, 525 South 4th Street, #241, Philadelphia, PA 19147. 180 pages. \$32.50. ISBN 0-7494-4170-4.

Summary Copyright © 2005 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY, 1-610-558-9495.

For additional information on the authors, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$195 per year in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and \$275 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, Pa., and additional offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2005 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

Available formats: Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (610-558-9495 outside the United States and Canada), or order on the Internet at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Soundview
Executive Book Summaries®

Tom Moore — *Contributing Editor*
Debra A. DePrinzio — *Senior Graphic Designer*
Chris Lauer — *Senior Editor*
Christopher G. Murray — *Editor in Chief*
George Y. Clement — *Publisher*

Interpreting the Party Line

(continued from page 2)

to the conclusion that the subsidiaries are being deliberately difficult or obstructive, and the people in the subsidiaries automatically assume that their foreign bosses simply don't care about the problems their directives are causing.

It's easy to jump to negative conclusions about other people's motives if you measure what they do and say against your own cultural norms. But not everyone looks at mission statements and corporate initiatives in the same way as you do, and your natural communication style could well seem brusque — or excessively indirect — to some of your foreign colleagues.

Mission Statements

Mission statements, although honorable, are often framed in very abstract terms. They have to be. A company cannot make a concrete and meaningful statement of intent and values without losing flexibility. Flexibility is what businesses need to survive. They've got to be able to make decisions quickly, and act upon them right away.

Theoretical										Empirical	
I like using abstract concepts to solve problems.	50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50
							For me, concrete experience is more important than theory.				

American managers lean toward the theoretical end of the scale above. They take the abstract values expressed in a mission statement very seriously and are prepared to spend time discussing them in depth. They have no trouble translating these general theories into concrete, practical guidelines that they can relate to their daily work.

Others lean toward the empirical end of the scale. If you lean toward this end of the scale, you might find it hard to take the kind of abstract theorizing contained in a mission statement seriously. Northern European managers tend to discuss core values briefly and dismiss them as meaningless. What possible relevance could they have to their daily working lives?

Corporate Initiatives

When you are working internationally, you have to make some effort to understand and adapt to the ways different cultures see things. If you don't, the company's attempts to project a consistent and harmonious external image will lead to considerable conflict and disharmony internally.

Implementing corporate initiatives is never easy. When one colleague is prepared to question his or her own assumptions and make an effort to put him- or herself in the other's position, the two colleagues now understand one another better than ever.

The French, Germans and Swiss would fall to the left of the scale on the right. They take a factual, balanced and logical view of any situation. If you want to get them on your side, make sure your argument is comprehensive and

Analytical										Intuitive	
What I value most is a logical, comprehensive and consistent argument. Even if I instinctively feel a proposal is right, I need to test every step in the argument before I can commit myself.	50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50
							What I value most are creative and intriguing ideas that appeal to the emotions. If I instinctively feel a proposal is right, I don't need to test every single step in the argument before I commit myself.				

consistent. Be positive, but support enthusiasm with solid facts and rational arguments. If you don't, they may well conclude that you're superficial, or even lazy.

Americans are impatient with time, willing to accept mistakes and happy to improvise. As a result, they would probably fall nearer the middle of this scale. When dealing with more intuitive cultures, resist the temptation to give them too many facts. Construct a logical argument, but keep it short and to the point. If you don't, they might think you are dull and unimaginative.

Working Rhythms

In monochronic cultures (Anglo-Saxon America, Canada, Australia, Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), *people prefer to deal with one task at a time in a structured fashion*. Time is linear, sequential and can be cut up into blocks. People are judged by how well they can control their time. Those who can't are not to be trusted.

In polychronic cultures (Hispanic United States, Latin America, India, the Arab world and Italy), *people prefer to have several tasks running at the same time*. Time is viewed as more circular: It's their servant, not their master. To them, how you nurture relationships is more important than how you manage your time.

You might expect all monochronic cultures to get everything done as fast and efficiently as possible, and all polychronic cultures to prefer taking their time. Unfortunately, life isn't that simple. Though the monochronic Germans often expect their meetings to be well structured and fairly quick, they can be very slow in making decisions. With the more polychronic Spanish, meetings can be long and rambling, but decisions are often made very rapidly. The Japanese, who are well known for taking a long time to reach a decision, expect implementation to be lightning-quick once a decision has been made.

Communication Style

It's a problem that confronts the corporate executive all too often: You arrive at the subsidiary, issue your instructions and then later discover that everyone has completely ignored them.

Low-context communicators believe *business relationships are complicated, and therefore, communication needs to be frank, explicit and direct*. They tend to express themselves in explicit, concrete, unequivocal terms. There's little cultural baggage or context attached to the words they

(continued on page 4)

Interpreting the Party Line

(continued from page 3)

use, and you can usually take what they say at face value. If you are, for example, American, German, Scandinavian or Finnish, you will probably fall into this category. When you're doing business with other low-context communicators, you will probably find their communication style reassuringly straightforward and comprehensible.

High-context communicators, on the other hand, believe *business relationships are complicated, and therefore, communication needs to be diplomatic, implicit and indirect.* They expect you to be able to interpret what they mean from your knowledge of the cultural values that lie behind the words, what they're actually talking about at the time, their tone of voice and, of course, their eye and body language. Both the French and the Japanese would be considered high-context communicators even though their cultural contexts are different. The modern business world is complex, diverse and often stressful. There's no panacea that will magically cure all these communication problems. But if you show a bit of genuine empathy, you'll find that, at the very least, it can be an effective painkiller.

The Perception Gap

When you are doing business with different cultures, there will almost certainly be a gap between your perceptions and theirs. This does not need to stop you from presenting a united front. The key to success is to acknowledge that there is a gap and to make genuine attempts to bridge it. The most successful cross-cultural communicators are those who are instinctively able to push the right buttons. To follow their example, you need to:

- Keep an open mind.
- Try to put yourself in the other person's position.
- Ask carefully chosen open questions (those that start with who, what, when, why, where, how, etc.).
- Really listen to the answers.
- Probe for more information by asking closed questions (those that invite a Yes or No answer) to check that any deductions you've made are correct. ■

Knowing Your Place

The multinational organization may need to present a united front to the outside world, but in your daily business life you will be dealing with people who work behind that front. In order for a dynamic company to move forward and grow, it needs internal diversity and competition. But these diverse individuals and competing groups have to be kept on track, synergies have to be achieved, consensus has to be reached and final decisions have to be taken. Which is why virtually every organization — no matter how small — has some kind of chain of command.

Most companies attempt to show how their hierarchy works by producing an organization chart. This will show who is nominally responsible for what, and who reports to whom. But how accurately does it reflect what happens on a day-to-day basis? Does it show what the balance of power really is, how far an individual's authority or responsibilities extend, or how much autonomy the people enjoy?

Flat Hierarchy						Vertical Hierarchy				
Leaders should share power.						Leaders should hold power.				
50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50

People from Scandinavia and Australia would probably fall to the far left of the scale above. In Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, company hierarchies are also relatively flat. Bosses tend to consult widely and subordinates are generally free to express their own views and challenge their boss' decisions. In flatter business cultures, running to the boss every time there is a problem is often seen as *bad form*.

Vertical Hierarchy

In France, Spain, Italy, Latin America, Southeast Asia, India, China, Africa and the Arab world, power in companies is held by a few people at the top. Managers are expected to tell people what to do. When the people with whom you are doing business come from one of these vertical cultures, you need to:

- Have clear lines of communication to senior management.
- Keep valuable information to yourself and only share it with those who can help you.
- Show great respect to the decision makers, while avoiding flattery. Don't get angry if your best ideas somehow become the brilliant solutions of the company president.
- Be firm and autocratic in your dealings with subordinates.

Monitoring Performance

The idea that businesses should be run along meritocratic lines is becoming more and more common. So, at first sight, you may well place yourself to the left of the scale below. But is that how you really feel, or how you believe you ought to feel?

Acquired Status						Given Status				
People should be judged on what they do, not who they are.						Other factors — such as family, class, nationality, race, education, age, sex, religion — should also be taken into account.				
50	40	30	20	10	0	10	20	30	40	50

Spain, Southern Italy, South America, India, China, Japan, the Arab world and Africa would lean toward the right of this scale. In these cultures, how fast you work your way up the hierarchy doesn't just depend upon how well you perform. Other factors — family, class,

(continued on page 5)

Knowing Your Place

(continued from page 4)

nationality, race, education, age, sex and religion — are also important. When dealing with people from these cultures, you should:

- Show respect for those older than you.
- Consider the age and length of service of your staff when assigning jobs.
- Be paternalistic with your subordinates.
- Dress appropriately and act demurely if you're a woman. ■

For additional information on how you can get people to play ball, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Knowing the Limits

A sales manager was sent by his company to an emerging market country to negotiate an important contract. On the first evening, his hosts took him out to dinner and kept refilling his glass with wine and liquor. The sales manager got very drunk. So much so, that he accepted an offer to spend the night with one of four beautiful women who had suddenly appeared on the scene. The next morning, his hosts presented him with the contract and asked him to sign it. "But we haven't negotiated the terms," he said.

"Yes we have," said his hosts. "The negotiation took place last night. Don't you remember?" When he still refused to sign, his hosts started to threaten him. Eventually, the sales manager left without signing. When he got home, he overcame his embarrassment and told his bosses exactly what had happened. He then phoned the prospective partners and arranged a meeting on neutral territory to negotiate the deal. He went to the next meeting with two colleagues and, this time, none of them drank anything stronger than mineral water.

Follow Your Conscience

Wherever you work in the world, you will occasionally come across people who are doing things that, by almost any standard, are deeply wrong. When that happens, all you can do is follow your own conscience. Unless you are very unlucky, however, it is likely that most of the people you meet will be trying to do what their own culture regards as acceptable. It just seems wrong to you because you're looking at it from your own cultural standpoint.

When you're working internationally, navigating your way smoothly through the moral maze will often require more time, more thought and more flexibility than it does at home. So remember these golden rules:

- Don't overreact or pass hasty judgments.
- Keep an open mind.
- Ask yourself why you think what's happening is

wrong and why the people you're dealing with draw the line in a different place.

- Re-examine the situation as objectively as possible.
- Look for ways of resolving the situation that will be acceptable to both parties' moral values and beliefs.
- Remain calm and constructive at all times.

Before you leap to any hasty conclusions about an international partner's moral probity, or lack of it, think carefully about your respective cultural assumptions. Once you know and understand your own limits and theirs, you should be able to work out how best to bridge the gap.

Rules, Regulations and Laws of the Land

If you believe in fixed truth — there are clear rights and wrongs regardless of the circumstances — you will probably expect people to follow rules and procedures to the letter. North Americans, Australians and Northern Europeans lean this way. People from these cultures tend to attach great importance to written contracts, organization charts, detailed quality control manuals and the like. They admire honesty and directness, even if it hurts people's feelings. When doing business with them, you should:

- Pay full attention to the written clauses of any contract you are negotiating.
- Keep your bargaining range narrow.
- Be prepared for open criticism or direct rejection.
- Use arguments based on logic and fact.
- Be careful when giving presents or doing favors.

Conversely, people who live in countries where there is a relative-truth culture — what is right and wrong depends on the circumstances — may have to modify their highly pragmatic approach when dealing with those who live by fixed truth. If not, there's a danger it will undermine their business partners' confidence in their integrity. When dealing with people from relative-truth cultures, you need to:

- Focus on building the relationship before getting down to business.
- Keep your bargaining range wide.
- Be ready to renegotiate a contract should the situation change.
- Maintain continuity in relationships.
- Use emotional arguments which show the benefits to the person's group.
- Avoid being too direct in your opinions.
- Accept small gifts and favors.

Gifts, Favors and Bribes

In cultures where business is personal, gift-giving and exchanging favors tend to be commonplace. The problem is, where do you draw the line between a gift and a bribe? How do you distinguish between reasonable business entertainment and thinly disguised corruption? Multinational

(continued on page 6)

Knowing the Limits

(continued from page 5)

companies must give these questions careful thought.

Everyone responds positively to genuine human warmth and empathy. However different their cultural values may be, your international business associates are human beings with the same basic needs and emotions as you. Small acts of kindness that demonstrate empathy and concern can often do as much, if not more, for the relationship as expensive gifts or nights out on the town.

If you're from a "functional" culture (Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia), you may not feel the need to build a close personal relationship with everyone with whom you do business. You may feel surprised or even impatient if your business associates spend too much time on small talk or socializing.

But there are many "personal" cultures (the Arab world, Asia, Southern Europe, Africa, South America) where people won't do business with you until they know and trust you. With them, you need to:

- Allow plenty of time.
- Engage in small talk.
- Be prepared to socialize with colleagues and clients.
- Be prepared to exchange favors and small gifts. ■

Knowing the Form

Good manners are all about showing warmth, consideration, deference and respect to others. But good manners go way beyond saying *please* and *thank you* or using the correct form of address. *Good form* is socially acceptable behavior. The trouble is, what you regard as good form may be considered bad form somewhere else, and vice versa.

There will always be some kind of gap between your social conventions and those of your international business partners. Finding out what the main differences are and making a conscious effort to honor local customs is relatively easy. Battling against your own subconscious can be much harder.

Greeting People

Generally, it's up to the visitor to know and honor local customs. But that does not mean initiating the hugging and kissing if that prevails in certain cultures — especially if it makes you feel awkward and uncomfortable. You would only come across as clumsy or insincere. But you should be careful not to show surprise or embarrassment if you are hugged or kissed. More importantly, do not allow your own social conditioning to lead to false or negative judgments.

For instance, Europeans find it hard to trust people who don't look them in the eye when shaking hands. But in Japan and other Asian cultures, people who look

you in the eye too directly and too long can appear aggressive and disrespectful.

Arabs, Africans, Indians, South Americans, Southern Italians and Greeks tend to be very tactile. With them, handshakes can go on forever, and they're likely to stand very close to you. In Eastern and Southeastern Asia, on the other hand, people tend to be far more physically distant. In Japan, physical contact between businesspeople in the office is almost nonexistent. Interestingly enough, however, when Japanese colleagues are socializing together in a bar after work, they seem to become more tactile, and it's not unusual to see them touching one another on the arm or patting someone on the back.

Making Small Talk

Some cultures prefer to focus on business first and personal relationships later, while others feel the need to build a personal relationship before they can do business.

At the beginning of any meeting with someone from the Arab world, for example, people expect to spend plenty of time getting to know one another or cementing the relationship. The conversation can extend to all aspects of life. In Japan, too, the aim at early meetings will be to develop personal trust. You must resist the urge to force the pace.

In more functional cultures, on the other hand, people expect to start on the business agenda within minutes of sitting down. With Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians and Finns, small talk is often limited to a couple of sentences. Don't assume they're being deliberately cold or unwelcoming. They're probably just trying to be professional and businesslike.

Playing the Conversation Game

Some cultures, such as the British and American, expect conversation to be interactive. To them, interrupting with the odd relevant comment or question shows interest. When people from these cultures are confronted with a business partner who sits and listens to them in absolute silence, it can make them feel uneasy. They may wonder if they have said something wrong, or even jump to the conclusion that the other person is cold or lacking in personality.

Other cultures, such as the Japanese and the Finns, wait their turn to speak. For them, conversation is often like a series of mini-monologues. They expect to have people listen carefully and not to interrupt. To do so would be considered ill-mannered, disrespectful or superficial.

For most Northern Europeans and North Americans, memoranda of understanding, contracts, written summaries and e-mailed offers carry more weight than what people say in a meeting. In dealing with them:

- Don't be offended if they take many notes.
- Don't be surprised if they get their lawyers involved early in the relationship.

(continued on page 7)

Knowing the Form

(continued from page 6)

- Don't assume an agreement has been made until it has been confirmed in writing.

For cultures that have a strong oral tradition, such as those in the Arab world, the spoken word tends to be more important. When you're trying to make deals with them:

- Don't take too many written notes during the meeting.
- Leave the lawyers at home.
- Don't make oral promises that you're not prepared to keep. ■

For additional information on choosing what to say and how to say it, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Making Presentations

Imagine that you work for a large pharmaceutical company that is about to launch an antifungal cream. As product manager, it's your job to present the new cream and ways of selling it to each of the four regional sales teams in your country. Should you deliver exactly the same presentation to each of the four teams or try to adapt it each time?

Most people would see nothing wrong with delivering exactly the same presentation to each of the teams. Many would also assume that, in this situation, it would be perfectly acceptable to let the facts speak for themselves. After all, they argue, there's no need to agonize over what might appeal to these audiences. They all work for the same company and they're all salespeople, so they're bound to be interested in the product and how to sell it.

A Common Denominator

It doesn't matter how relevant you think the subject matter is, you must still try to put it in a context to which the audience can relate. As every audience is different, you're going to have to change the context to suit each one. You cannot create a universal presentation what will be equally relevant and memorable to a series of different listeners. What interests and appeals to one group may well bore or irritate another.

What can you do if you don't know the people to whom you're presenting? If you don't know the members of your audience personally, ask yourself what you know about them as a group. For example, are they all engineers, do they all come from one country and are they the same age? You have to keep asking questions about them until you find some common denominator.

But what if the audience does different jobs, comes from different countries and is comprised of people of all different ages? It would be easy to think that the only common denominator then is the information you are to present. Not true. You're forgetting the most important thing they have in common. They are all human beings

with certain needs and aims in common. It's just a question of finding which of their needs and aims you could most effectively appeal to in this particular presentation.

Know Your Audience

What people expect from a presentation varies from culture to culture. Some people think the best presentations are thorough and detailed with plenty of supporting facts and documentation. Others will only listen to you if you're brief and selective. Some audiences are impressed by a logical structure; others by a creative one. Some presenters aim to inform; others want to persuade or entertain.

When you are having a conversation with someone, you can see or hear his or her reactions. Provided you are willing to try to put yourself in his or her position, you can adapt what you say and the way you say it as the conversation progresses. But when you sit down to prepare a presentation, the members of your audience aren't around. You have to put the whole thing together without any input or feedback from them.

Focusing on yourself and your own agenda is a major block to successful communication, in whatever context you're operating. If you want the members of your audience to really sit up and listen, you have to make sure that everything you say and every visual you show is interesting and relevant to them.

When you're presenting internationally, you have to make a conscious effort to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes. That does not mean you should try to change your natural style so radically that you feel uncomfortable.

Low-Key Audiences

Putting your message across persuasively and positively is something that all presenters should aim to do. When presenting to a low-key audience that lets facts speak for themselves, such as one made up of the Swiss:

- Make sure you can support what you say with relevant details and facts.
- Respond to concerns realistically and factually.
- Don't put too much emphasis on your own successes and achievements.

When you come from a low-key culture and you are presenting to upbeat cultures that always try to emphasize the positive aspects of a situation, such as Americans:

- Try to find an upbeat central message that looks forward rather than back.
- Make an effort to sound positive and optimistic.

American and British audiences tend to respond best to presentations that are short and selective. When presenting to them, be concise and never go over an agreed-upon time limit. Conversely, when presenting to Italian, German, Scandinavian, Finnish and Japanese audiences, you must avoid being overly simplistic and you should work to sup-

(continued on page 8)

Making Presentations

(continued from page 7)

port arguments with plenty of relevant facts and data.

Even if you are presenting to an audience that values facts and background information, it is still vital to be selective. Remember that the most dangerous subject for you as a presenter is the one that fascinates you — the one on which you're the world expert. Check your motives. Does the audience really need to know the point you are making?

Americans, Italians and the British expect presenters to interpret the facts for them. When presenting to them you should provide your opinions upfront and tell them directly what your recommendations are and why. In addition, you should present your case as persuasively as possible.

The Germans, Scandinavians, Finns and Japanese, on the other hand, expect you to let them draw their own conclusions. When presenting to them, avoid the hard sell.

Before you can adapt to your audience's expectations, you need to do two things:

1. Analyze your own style and preferences as objectively as possible.

2. Resist the temptation to believe that you are right and the rest of the world is wrong.

If you know yourself, keep an open mind and make every effort to know your audience, you can always find a way to bridge even the widest culture gap.

Getting Your Message Across

Wherever audience members are from, your presentation will only be successful if they listen to what you're saying and remember the message you're trying to get across. These guidelines can help you achieve this objective:

- **Know your audience.** Who are they? How much do they already know about the subject? How do they feel about it (hostile, neutral or positive)? What will they gain from listening to you? What are they expecting?

- **Create a central message.** Try to express in one clear, punchy sentence what the presentation is about and what the audience will gain from listening to you.

- **Choose only the points that support your central message and are relevant to the audience.**

- **Always look for the common denominator.** People only see something when they have the right metaphor to perceive it.

- **Speak with impact by keeping sentences short, simple and active, avoiding long abstract nouns, using verbs your audience will understand and avoiding idiomatic expressions.**

- **Stress the important parts of the sentence.** Pause after each phrase and sentence. At every step, tell the members of your audience where they are, where they've been and where they're going. ■

Making Deals

When a deal falls through, most negotiators automatically blame some practical issue: The client couldn't afford to pay for the quality we offer or we don't have the capacity to supply the volumes they want. Few people admit that they lost a contract because they did not handle the client or the negotiation in the right way. In the international arena, however, it's your negotiating style above all else that can make or break a deal.

The most fragile aspect in international partnerships is the relationship between the people involved. By maintaining a "soft on people, hard on points" approach, you should be able to nurture the relationship while still ensuring that you give no ground on the commercial issues.

If your partners have decided that negotiating is about fighting, that's fine. Fight over the points, but do everything you can to avoid making it personal. Few people in the world will warm to you if you irritate or offend them. ■

Knowing Yourself

There will always be a culture gap of one kind or another between you and your international business partners. Most misunderstandings arise because those involved assumed that their own beliefs, attitudes and behavior were normal. In many cases, it didn't occur to them that those with whom they were dealing looked at the world from a completely different perspective. As a result, negative stereotypes were reinforced, motives were misinterpreted, goodwill was damaged and communications broke down altogether.

Knowing yourself is the first and most important step toward bridging the culture gap. The second is to acknowledge that the way you and your compatriots look at the world is not universal. The third is to find out as much as you can about what other cultures value and what lies behind their beliefs.

To find out who you are, there are five key issues on which to focus: relationships, communication, time, truth and the meaning of life. ■



If you liked *Bridging the Culture Gap*, you'll also like:

1. ***Working GlobeSmart*** by Ernest Gundling. Gundling explains how to predict and overcome the challenges of conducting global business by developing the right people skills.
2. ***Global Teams*** by Michael Marquardt and Lisa Horvath. The authors explain how to turn new international workers into a unified and productive work force.
3. ***Success for the New Global Manager*** by Maxine Dalton, Chris Ernst, Jennifer Deal and Jean Leslie. The authors show how managers can be successful when working across vast distances.
4. ***Survival Skills for Overseas Living*** by L. Robert Kohls. Kohls shows Americans the crucial concepts for thriving in unfamiliar cultures.
5. ***Expert Expatriate*** by Melissa Brayer Hess and Patricia Linderman. Hess and Linderman present a guidebook for those relocating in a foreign destination.

For additional information on how to speak with impact, go to: <http://my.summary.com>