Collaborating Across Cultures

Presented by Julia Gaspar-Bates and Laurette Bennhold-Samaan

HRDLS Intercultural Program
Your Presenters

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Objectives

- Identify cultural differences in your global work environment and understand how they may contribute to challenges in your day-to-day business interactions
- Explore how cultural preferences impact communication and trust, and bridge the cultural gaps to optimize collaboration
- Learn tips and best practices to enhance cultural sensitivity and effectiveness across cultures and borders
Poll 1

What is your top challenge collaborating in a virtual environment?
When you work in a virtual environment, we should invest more time in listening and understanding the cultural aspects before we engage in a project.

Be genuine with people. If they understand that you are transparent, they will begin to have trust. It’s also important to show empathy by talking to people and understanding the issues that they face in their own lives—not only professionally but also their family lives.

Communication needs to be personal and direct as much as possible. It’s important to have regular and consistent country team meetings. In the day-to-day work there are lots of issues to resolve.

Source: Interviews with WBG Staff
Summary: Lux-O’s US / Japan global marketing team is attempting to pursue growth targets for the Japanese market. There's a growing conviction of senior leadership that the company can be more effective in selling its luxury goods to the Japanese market. The CEO has recently shared a stretch target for increased sales of 20 - 25%. The two sides of the team see the opportunity differently.
1. What was the main cultural mishap that occurred during this meeting?

2. Does this video reflect your virtual meetings with your global colleagues, clients or partners?
Culture is...

- the shared knowledge of a group on **how we tend to** behave, perceive, think, relate and react in a specific context
- **the unwritten rules** of what is expected, accepted, rewarded and rejected within a social group
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy (Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical)</td>
<td>Hands on/ Hands off; levels of power and empowerment. Supervision and authority vs. space of autonomy for team effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group (Individual vs. Group)</td>
<td>I vs. We; independent vs. interdependent; individual vs. consensus; group harmony. Personal priorities and decisions vs. group priorities and decisions</td>
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<td>Relationships (Transactional vs. Interpersonal)</td>
<td>Importance/time devoted to building relationships and, developing trust ( if team-building and trust are your priority or deliveries)</td>
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<td>Communication (Direct vs. Indirect)</td>
<td>How is much context is needed? Are you comfortable disagreeing/ saying NO/giving constructive feedback and calling out undesired behaviors? How do you address face issues?</td>
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<td>Time (Fluid vs. Controlled)</td>
<td>Sense of punctuality and priorities. How would you react if someone fails to deliver on time as promised</td>
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<td>Change (Averse vs. Tolerant)</td>
<td>Rules, procedures, step-to-step plans, doing it right vs. flexibility, initiating changes, and trial and error. Your comfort level with uncertainty and unpredictable changes</td>
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<td>Formality (Formal vs. Informal)</td>
<td>Levels of formality and appropriacy: dress codes, protocols, titles of addressing, office set-up. What is the new dress code for working at home</td>
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<td>Motivation (Work-life Balance vs Status)</td>
<td>Which is more important for you: well-being, work/life balance or social or work accomplishment? Would you tend to work in the evenings and weekend</td>
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What is your top challenge collaborating in a virtual environment?

1. Poor and/or conflictual communication
2. Low levels of trust with colleagues and/or clients
3. Slow pace of decision-making
4. Constant interruptions and/or silence during virtual meetings
5. Stress due to unpredictable changes
6. Lack of interpersonal interactions
7. Meeting deadlines and deliverables
8. Other (please specify in chatbox)
Poll 3

Which of these cultural dimensions impact the top challenge you identified? (multiple choice)
Communicating Across Cultures
**Context of Communication**

**High Context**
- Indirect, ambiguous and flowery communication
- Reliance on non-verbals and emotional response
- Focus on context, harmony and how well the message is received
- Read between the lines (what is NOT being said)

**Low Context**
- Direct, concise and to the point (KISS)
- Reliance primarily on words, facts
- Focus on information exchange, opinions and ideas and clear delivery of message
- Say what you mean and mean what you say
## Context of Communication Lost

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Voice Tone</th>
<th>Instant Feedback</th>
<th>Use of Graphics</th>
<th>Non-Verbal Cues</th>
<th>Environmental Cues</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Face-to-Face</td>
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<td>Phone &amp; Conference Calls</td>
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<td>Instant Messaging</td>
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Source: Aperian Global
Reflect on your own communication style

- Do you tend to write brief, to the point emails or messages with lots of detail and information?
- Is your style formal or informal?
- What do you do to establish rapport?
- What tone do you set?
- How clear is your message?
- How much do you cc your manager or other colleagues?
You are working on a project with a colleague who is based in a different country office. You are at the same hierarchical rank and, although you have never met in person, your collaboration is of strategic importance to the project’s success.

Your colleague has not adhered to the goals and work tasks discussed at the beginning of the project, nor has s/he provided data by the agreed upon date. You are very concerned that this may compromise the project’s outcome and deliverables promised to the client. You need to address it immediately to ensure that his/her contributions are accurate and met in a timely manner.
To: AAA  
From: BBB  
CC: JJJ, LLL, TTT  
Subject: Urgent topic  

Dear AAA,

The parameters of this project were clearly determined at its inception, and you have not met the agreed upon deadline. I’m displeased with this lack of follow through as it does not meet the criteria we agreed upon from the start. It’s important that you stick to our goals and timeline or else we are going to have problems with the client. We need to discuss this further so I can explain more clearly what I mean. I will call you tomorrow.

Regards,
BBB
To: XXX
From: YYY
Subject: Project performance measures

Dear XXX,
How are you? I hope that all is well with you. There appear to be some challenges with the project and since this project is so important, perhaps we could discuss the data that is needed so we can move forward with the client. Please suggest some times that work for you.

Best regards,
YYY
To: XXX
From: YYY
Subject: Project performance measures

Dear XXX,
I hope this email finds you well. It was brought to our attention that some areas of the project need to be addressed, specifically with regards to the goals and timely delivery of the data. There are concerns that if they are not attended to carefully and immediately, they may negatively impact the project. Given the importance of this project for our team as well as the client, I thought it would be a good idea for us to chat to ensure we are in alignment with the goals and delivery milestones. Please suggest a time that works for you this week.

Best regards,
YYY
Verbal Communication Tips

- Begin meetings with some small talk to build social rapport
- Address each participant by name
- Embrace facetime (Teams, Zoom, Webex, etc.)
- Identify a meeting facilitator; rotate roles
- Clarify objectives and ground rules
- Assign speaking time to each participant to ensure everyone participates
- Speak slowly and clearly; allow for pauses
- Address disagreements with an individual privately offline
- Avoid cultural slang, idioms, and acronyms
Written Communication Tips

- Send agenda and documents at least 24 hours prior to meeting to allow for preparation
- Take Minutes during meeting with specific follow-up actions
- Avoid using all capitals, bold or underlined text, or emoticons to highlight email messages
- Use clear, simple words; be explicit who is responsible for action items
- Use formal salutations at beginning/ end of emails (Dear.., Regards.., etc.)
- Address each recipient in rank order
- Determine protocols for CC’ing others
- Determine mutually agreeable response time to email messages
“Trust is built in drops and lost in buckets.”

~ Kevin Plank
What are the top two most important criteria for you to build trust?
Trust = \frac{C + R + I}{S}

- Credibility
- Reliability
- Intimacy
- Self-Orientation

Source: Adapted from David H. Maiseter, Charles Green, Robert Galford
Recommended Tips to Enhance Virtual Collaboration

- Schedule one-on-one meetings with colleagues or clients, preferably with video, to compensate for lack of physical f2f interaction
- Do regular check-ins with staff to ensure their safety and show as much empathy as possible to additional struggles they are facing
- Consider doing short icebreakers at the beginning of each team or client meeting to encourage engagement, connections and fun
- Listen actively to what is being said—both explicitly and implicitly—and don’t hesitate to ask clarifying questions to ensure understanding
- Develop clear meeting protocols to ensure everyone’s voice is heard and to minimize conflict
- Encourage sharing of personal challenges and set clear boundaries with work hours and expectations
Determine the normal working days and hours of your team members and clients

Adjust working hours to create more overlap with global team members and clients

Check daylight savings schedules

Establish rotating meeting time

Be aware of national holidays and vacation schedules

Ensure technology compatibility, national infrastructure and electricity availability
Questions?
Thank you!