Cross Cultural Dialogues
(adapted from Craig Storti, Intercultural Press, Inc. 1994)

*Working on Saturday*

Mr. Jones is the supervisor; John is the student assistant

Mr. Jones: It looks like we’re going to have to come in early on Saturday to make sure the conference event is set up on time.

John: I see.

Mr. Jones: Can you come in on Saturday?

John: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Jones: That’ll be a great help.

John: Yes. Saturday’s a special day, did you know?

Mr. Jones: How do you mean?

John: It’s my father’s birthday.

Mr. Jones: How nice. I hope you all enjoy it very much.

John: Thank you. I appreciate your understanding.

Questions:

1. Do you think John will be show up on Saturday?
2. How many attempts did John make to say that he won’t be able to make it?
3. What is left unsaid? What assumptions are being made?
4. Relate this dialogue to a situation at your work place.
5. How do you communicate to your student assistants about working on special projects which require weekend hours or overtime?
Cross Cultural Dialogues
(adapted from Craig Storti, Intercultural Press, Inc. 1994)

Writing a Report

Judy Colson is the supervisor; Ram is the student assistant

Judy: How are the evaluations for the conference going, Ram?
Ram: It's finished, ma'am. We can start on the report anytime now.
Judy: Good. How long do you think it will take?
Ram: Ma'am?
Judy: To write the report.
Ram: I couldn't say, ma'am.
Judy: You don't know how long it will take?
Ram: When would you like it to be done, ma'am?
Judy: Well, I want to give you enough time to do a good job.
Ram: We'll do a good job, ma'am.

Questions:

1. Why is Judy surprised that Ram doesn't know how long writing the report will take?
2. What did Ram mean when he said, "When would you like it to be done, ma'am?"
3. What cultural values do you associate with
   a. Judy Colson?
   b. Ram?
4. Relate this dialogue to a situation at your work place.
5. How do you communicate deadlines to your student assistants?
Cross Cultural Dialogues
(Adopted from Craig Storti, Intercultural Press, Inc. 1994)

Explanations

Ms. Vu is the supervisor; Ms. Vida is the student assistant.

Ms. Vu: Vida, what can I do for you?
Vida: Excuse me, I need some help with running the accessibility report for this site.
Ms. Vu: Of course. I would be happy to explain it to you.
Vida: I asked Kanchan, but she couldn’t help me.
Ms. Vu: No, she is new and has not been trained in running accessibility report.
Vida: It is a little bit complicated.
Ms. Vu: It is very complicated. But, after I explain it to you and asked you if you understood, you said yes.
Vida: Yes, please excuse me.

Questions:

1. Why did Vida say yes when Ms. Vu asked if she understood?
2. Why did Vida asked Kanchan for help and not Ms. Vu when she did not understand?
3. What did Visa actually mean when she said “it’s a little bit complicated”?
4. Relate this dialogue to a situation at your work place.
5. How do you ensure that your student assistants understand your instructions?
FEATyRES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT STYLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Style: Individualistic Cultures</th>
<th>Indirect Style: Collectivistic Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Forthright tone of voice, straight talk (e.g. “say what you mean”, “the bottom line is”)</td>
<td>▪ More nuanced tone of voice (e.g. the speaker tends to “beat around the bush”)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> openness is synonymous with being sincere and honest</td>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> concern is for upholding harmonious interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Person-oriented verbal interaction e.g. the use of first names, informality, “laid-back style”</td>
<td>▪ Status-oriented verbal interaction e.g. the use of titles, social roles are emphasized</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> focus on the individual, emphasizing informality and role suspension, respect for individual uniqueness and personal identities</td>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> focus on the group, emphasizing formality and large power distance - hierarchy is important; importance of honoring prescribed power-based membership identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Verbal self-enhancement</td>
<td>▪ Verbal self-effacement, practicing verbal restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> importance of acknowledging one’s accomplishments and abilities</td>
<td><strong>Value System:</strong> importance of humbling oneself, being modest</td>
</tr>
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Based on Low-Context Communication (LCC) and High-Context Communication (HCC) Frameworks by Edward Hall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LCC Characteristics (Individualistic Culture)</th>
<th>HCC Characteristics (Collectivistic Culture)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Verbal-based understanding i.e. use of words, “straight talk”, explicit verbal messages</td>
<td>▪ Context-based understanding i.e. context more important, implied meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Speaker-oriented style i.e. sender of message responsible for clear communication</td>
<td>▪ Listener-oriented style i.e. receiver of message responsible for interpretation of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Individualistic values e.g. use of “I”</td>
<td>▪ Group-oriented values e.g. use of “We”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Self-face concern</td>
<td>▪ Mutual-face concern</td>
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LCC Examples  
Germany  United States  Saudi Arabia  Japan  
Switzerland  Canada  Kuwait  China  
Denmark  Australia  Mexico  South Korea  
Sweden  United Kingdom  Nigeria  Vietnam

Ltt 04/2011
CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUES IN THE WORKPLACE

List of strategies for effective communication with student assistants

Culturally-sensitive strategies:

- Be mindful of cultural differences for the following concepts:
  - Time (being late)
  - Hierarchy of authority (employer/employee relationship) i.e. “power distance”
  - Space (physical distance between 2 speakers)
  - Face saving
- Be aware of different communication styles: in general, people from collectivist cultures tend to use indirect speech to explain or to request something
  - When s/he says “yes”, consider if this is his/her real response
  - When you detect indirect styles of communication, use a direct style to double-check
- Watch for non-verbal behavior i.e. body language:
  - Eye contact (it may be considered rude to look you in the eye especially when student assistants are from a culture that respects authority)
  - Nodding to indicate a positive response but it may not actually mean yes

General strategies:

- Clarify expectations on the first day of hiring e.g. issues of time, work ethics, etc.
- These should be addressed at least once a month (student assistants may forget!)
- For every task that you assign, make sure s/he understands each task clearly
- Ask him/her to repeat to you what s/he has to do
- Write down step-by-step instructions
- Encourage questions from student assistants
- Re-phrase the question that s/he asks you (i.e. do not make assumptions)
- Always treat student assistants with respect

Ltt04/2011
Resources:

1. Culture Matters: The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook Culture Matters
   http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/


4. Stella Ting-Toomey and Leeva Chung: “Understanding Intercultural Communication”
   (Roxbury Publishing Co. 2005)

Quotes:

“For a Spaniard, success lies in the title as much as in the salary, and much more than in the
work.” ~ Helen Wattley Ames [Spain Is Different]

“The hierarchical nature of Indian society demands that there is a boss and that the boss should
be seen to be the boss. Everyone else just does as they are told, and even if they know the
boss if 100% wrong, no one will argue.” ~ Gitanjali Kolanad [Culture Shock: India]

“Not only can’t you change careers so easily in Europe, most people don’t even think of it.
Mainly the European becomes tired at the very idea of risk.” ~ Stuart Miller [Understanding
Europeans]

“When someone says privacy, I think of loneliness.” ~ Ethiopian student in John Fieg and John
Blair [There Is A Difference]

“To the Japanese a relationship is what holds agreements together.” ~ William Bohnaker [The
Hollow Doll]

“Time commitments (in Mexico) are considered desirable objectives but not binding promises.”
~ Eva Kras [Management in Two Cultures]