

Unit 14

Cultural Differences—Manners and Taboos

文化差异—礼仪禁忌

Comprehension questions:

1. How has the author linked executive manners to business success?
2. Why does the author say “good manners are cost-effective”?
3. Why can a high appreciation of protocol make an individual stand out?
4. How would you define *protocol*? What does it cover usually?

Part A Exercises

1) **Directions:** *Listen to the first conversation carefully and answer the following questions.*

- (1) Why did the Japanese employee respond to the American boss' praise in such a silent way? Is he “rude” in such a setting? Or is the American manager “rude” to openly praise the Japanese employee in front of his colleagues?
- (2) What cultural differences can you draw from this conversation between American and Japanese cultures?
- (3) What suggestions can you offer to the American manager to avoid such kind of awkward encounters in the similar cases?

2) **Directions:** *Listen to the second conversation carefully and answer the following questions:*

- (1) Why does Mr. Sato feel puzzled when Mr. Rogers first suggest starting their meeting?
- (2) Do you think it is proper for Mr. Rogers to put Sato's business card into his wallet immediately? Why?
- (3) Why does Sato insist on introducing themselves first, such as the positions in the company before beginning the meeting?

Part B Exercises

1) **Directions:** *Listen to the talk on handshaking and fill in the following figure with appropriate information you hear.*

Culture	Type of Handshakes (with eye contact)
United States	
Chinese	

British	
German	
French	
Japanese	
Middle Eastern	

2) Directions: *Listen to the conversation on gift-giving and write whether the following statements are T (true) or F(false).*

- (1) () The gifts for the group of Japanese visitors are not the same.
- (2) () If one of the visitors found his gift were the same to that for his director, he would feel grateful and satisfied.
- (3) () Making gifts numbered up to four and sending a knife as a gift are among the various taboos in dealing with the gifts for Japanese people.
- (4) () For Japanese visitors, whiskey for men and flowers for their wives can never be used as gift.
- (5) () An efficient secretary keeps the record of the gift distributed.

Part C Exercises

1) Directions: *Listen to the talk on Hall's high- and low-context orientation and fill in the blanks in the table with appropriate information you hear.*

	Features	Examples of countries
High-context culture		
Low-context culture		

2) Directions: *Listen to the talk again and decide whether the following statements are "T" (true) or "F"(false).*

- (1) () A distinguished 75-year-old Chinese scholar was being honored by a university in the United States.
- (2) () The old man who had sat on airplanes and in airports for 24 hours straight was very tired.
- (3) () In response to the same comment, "You must be tired!" he replies, "Tired! I've never been tired in my life!"
- (4) () The Western traveler's reaction belongs to high-context cultures.
- (5) () The Chinese old man has more tendency to trust words.

👤 👤 Acting out

1. Research work: Please assign one topic for each group to search and then make a report back to the whole class.

- 1) Office protocol: phone-call, welcome and farewell, smoking, dressing.
- 2) Meeting protocol: how to hold successful meetings.
- 3) Gift-giving protocol: choice of gifts in different cultures.
- 4) Greeting protocol: different greeting manners in different cultures.

2. Group work: Work in groups of three and analyze the following case by using Hall's theory. Then role-play this scenario. (One acts as the female Chinese neurologist, one acts as the Canadian therapist, and the last one acts as the patient).

A female neurologist from Beijing was working on a research project in a Toronto hospital. She shared a small office with a young Canadian male from a large family, who loved peanut butter. He was so fond of peanut butter that he kept a jar in the office. One day he came into the office and exclaimed, "Who took my peanut butter?" (This was not clearly encoded even though his Canadian culture is lower-context than higher-context. He really meant, "Where is my peanut butter? I can't find it.") But the Chinese woman immediately felt accused. After all, there were only two of them in the office.

She was deeply distressed, but due to her learned cultural behavior of never showing anger in public, she said nothing. Later that day she was working in a room where the Canadian, a physiotherapist, was treating a patient who suffered paralysis of his legs and arms from a motorcycle accident. The therapist moved one of the patient's legs in a way that caused him pain.

"Ouch!" he cried.

"Oh, I didn't do that," said the Canadian. "It was that doctor over there," and he pointed to the Chinese woman.

"How could she have done it since she's on the other side of the room?" the patient pointed out.

"Ah, she has three hands," the therapist replied.

At these words the Chinese doctor became even more upset. She was so disturbed that she behaved in a way uncharacteristic of her culture. She waited until the patient had gone, and then said to the therapist, "I'm very upset by what you said." The Canadian was taken aback. "What had I said?" "You said I had three hands," the doctor finally choked. "You think I took the peanut butter."

What was going on in this exchange? The therapist was making a joke that operated on two levels when he said the doctor had "three hands." He wasn't serious, of course, and expected the patient to be amused at his fanciful explanation for his pain: that the doctor on the other side of the room could have reached an imaginary third hand out to touch him.

The Chinese woman came from a culture where the question "Who did this?" means someone is to blame. Her culture furthermore prohibits direct accusation unless a person has been targeted for shame. Shame is a terrible ordeal since it means

punishment for not being a cooperative member of the group. And finally, in Chinese a “three-handed person” is slang for a thief.

The therapist didn’t know that, nor did he know anything about a missing jar of peanut butter. But because the Chinese woman spoke out loud and put her distress into words, the whole episode was resolved. The therapist explained to the doctor that he only said “three hands” because it was so obvious the doctor was not responsible for causing the pain to the patient. (Beamer & Varner, p.27)

Key to Exercises

Part A

1) Conversation 1

- (1) Do you think it appropriate for the American manager to openly praise the Japanese employee in front of his colleagues? Why yes or no?

No. The open praise by the American manager not only pushed that Japanese worker to the corner—off guard and speechless, but may result in another side effect, i.e. the American manager may lose the respect from the other Japanese workers present because he openly praised someone among them. Had he any knowledge of the cultural differences, he would not have blamed that Japanese worker as “rude”.

- (2) Why did the Japanese employee respond to the American boss’ praise in such a silent way? Is he “rude” in such a setting?

According to the Japanese practice, the Japanese employee is not rude to respond to his American boss’ praise in such a silent way, because in Japan, an individual should never be singled out from his group for praise.

- (3) What cultural differences can you draw from this conversation between American and Japanese cultures?

While Americans advocate their individualism, Japanese stick firmly to their collectivism, a spirit deeply instilled into the minds of the Japanese.

- (4) What suggestions can you offer to the American manager to avoid such kind of awkward encounters in the similar cases?

If you should give the case a closer look, we would find that there is little consideration of the Japanese culture in the way the American manager talked to that Japanese worker. Therefore, to avoid such kind of awkward encounters, the American manager should gain some knowledge of Japanese business culture and adapt to it accordingly.

2) Conversation 2

- (1) Why does Mr. Sato feel puzzled when Mr. Rogers first suggest starting their meeting?

Because according to Japanese business practice, business people usually have some kind of small talks before coming down to business meetings, which they believe will help create a more harmonic atmosphere for the talk..

- (2) Do you think it is proper for Mr. Rogers to put Sato’s business card into his wallet

Immediately? Why?

No. Because the practice in the U.S. of glancing at the business card and promptly putting it in the pocket is considered rude in countries like Japan. The Japanese examine the business card carefully and make some comment while accepting it. During meetings, place the business cards of others attending in front of you on the conference table to properly refer to names, ranks, and titles, Use both hands when presenting your card in Japan; position the card so that the person can read it. Presentation of the card varies with the culture.

- (3) Why does Sato insist on introducing themselves, such as the positions in the company instead of beginning the meeting?

Because it is very important for a Japanese businessman to know the position of his business partner in the company before they start the meeting. Japanese society is of high hierarchy, in which one should behave properly according to his or her position.

Part B

1) Hand-shaking

Culture	Type of Handshaking
United States	A firm handshake plus direct eye contact, step forward to shake hands, then loosen their grips quickly, and back to keep a certain distance from each other
Chinese	Hold hands at first, then come closer to each other
Japanese	Keep a greater distance, slightly bow, avoid focusing straight into the eyes of another person
British	Soft
German	Firm, more frequent, repeated on arrival and departure, traditionally accompanied by a slight bow
French	Softer and limp
Middle Eastern	Gentle; repeated frequently, and free hand placed on forearm of other person, the eyes are hooded, even languid

2) Gift-giving

1. T 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T

Part C

1)

	Features	Examples of countries
High-context culture	Most of the information is in the physical context or is internalized in the people who are a part of the interaction. Very little information is actually coded in the verbal message. People are more adept at reading nonverbal behavior and the	Japan, Korea, China

	environment.	
Low-context culture	Most of the information is contained in the verbal message, and very little is embedded in the context or within the participants.	German, American

2)

1. T 2. T 3. F 4. F 5. F