

Cultural Boundary in Business: Japan & The US #1

Today, _____ you work in New York or Tokyo, we are _____, and working with people from other countries _____ familiar to us. Of course, language skills are _____, but those alone _____. For example, when _____ working with people from the United States, having good English skills is _____, but we also need to learn the cultural differences between _____ and Japanese. The culture _____ we grow up has a _____ how we see the world. In any _____ culture, members are _____ from _____ to understand the world in a particular way, to see certain communication patterns as effective or _____, and _____ certain ways of making decisions “natural” or “strange.” Of course, every individual is different and we should not _____ based on where they come from. However, we should have _____ the influence of _____ our behaviors _____ respect for individual differences. Both are important.

Today, whether you work in New York or Tokyo, we are all part of a global community, and working with people from other countries is becoming increasingly familiar to us. Of course, language skills are necessary, but those alone aren't enough. For example, when it comes to working with people from the United States, having good English skills is certainly essential, but we also need to learn the cultural differences between Americans and Japanese. The culture in which we grow up has a profound impact on how we see the world. In any given culture, members are subconsciously conditioned from birth to understand the world in a particular way, to see certain communication patterns as effective or undesirable, and to consider certain ways of making decisions “natural” or “strange.” Of course, every individual is different and we should not stereotype others based on where they come from. However, we should have humility to recognize the influence of cultural factors over our behaviors as well as respect for individual differences. Both are important.

necessary	必要な	undesirable	望ましくない
essential	不可欠な	stereotype	型にはめる
profound	重大な、深遠な	humility	謙虚さ
subconsciously	無意識に、潜在意識で	recognize	認める、認識する
condition	慣らす、訓練付ける		

What do you think makes a good _____ in business? Well, the definition _____ culture to culture. In Anglo-Saxon cultures including the United States, people are _____ to communicate as _____ as possible, _____ many Asian cultures, they often believe good communication is _____, _____, and _____. These _____ styles of communication are often _____ low-context and high-context, _____. Low-context cultures like the US assume that there is very little _____, so messages have to be _____ and _____ in order to avoid _____. _____, communication in high-context cultures like Japan is based on the _____ that they share a _____ understanding and knowledge. Communication is often implicit to save time and maintain relationships. For example, a question like “Can you complete this project by next week?” may bring _____ answers: “It will be very difficult, but I’ll do my best,” “We’ll think about it.” Low-context communicators may _____ “yes”, but they _____ mean “no.”

What do you think makes a good communicator in business? Well, the definition varies significantly from culture to culture. In Anglo-Saxon cultures including the United States, people are subconsciously trained to communicate as literally and explicitly as possible, while in many Asian cultures, they often believe good communication is implicit, subtle, and nuanced. These contrasting styles of communication are often referred to as low-context and high-context, respectively. Low-context cultures like the US assume that there is very little shared knowledge, so messages have to be precise and clear in order to avoid misunderstandings. Conversely, communication in high-context cultures like Japan is based on the assumption that they share a lot of common understanding and knowledge. Communication is often implicit to save time and maintain relationships. For example, a question like “Can you complete this project by next week?” may bring ambiguous answers: “It will be very difficult, but I’ll do my best,” “We’ll think about it.” Low-context communicators may take them as “yes”, but they virtually mean “no.”

definition	定義	reffer	言及する、～と言う
vary	異なる	context	文脈、背景
literally	文字通り	respectively	それぞれ、各自
explicitly	明白に、はっきりと	precise	正確な、精密な
implicitly	それとなく、暗黙の	ambiguous	曖昧な、不明瞭な
subtle	微妙な、わずかな	virtually	実質的に、事実上
nuanced	微妙に違っている		

Another _____ in international business is the difference _____ decision-making processes.

For example, Americans usually prefer a _____ approach in which generally the person _____ makes decisions quickly _____ the entire group. _____ for group agreement, the American boss says to the group, “This is what we are going to do,” and most members of the team _____, _____ their own opinions.

By contrast, a majority of Japanese companies _____ consensus culture where the decision making takes quite a long time, since everyone is _____. In typical Japanese companies, _____ starts with _____, face-to-face discussions. This process of informally _____ and gaining support is called “_____” or in Japanese “nemawashi.”

With a longer, _____ decision-making process, _____ is quicker since everyone _____ the decision, most people agree with it, and the decision is _____. On the other hand, Americans often believe that a decision is just a _____ to continue discussion and _____ always _____ to respond flexibly to _____ situations.

Another cause of conflicts in international business is the difference in decision-making processes.

For example, Americans usually prefer a top-down approach in which generally the person in charge makes decisions quickly on behalf of the entire group. Rejecting the need for group agreement, the American boss says to the group, “This is what we are going to do,” and most members of the team fall in line, regardless of their own opinions.

By contrast, a majority of Japanese companies belong to consensus culture where the decision making takes quite a long time, since everyone is consulted. In typical Japanese companies, consensus building starts with informal, face-to-face discussions. This process of informally making a proposal and gaining support is called “root-finding” or in Japanese “nemawashi.”

With a longer, consensus-based decision-making process, implementation is quicker since everyone is aware of the decision, most people agree with it, and the decision is fixed and inflexible. On the other hand, Americans often believe that a decision is just a temporary agreement to continue discussion and it can always be changed to respond flexibly to variable situations.

in charge	責任を担う	consult	相談する、意見を求める
fall in line	従う	implementation	履行、実行
regardless	～に関わらず	fix	決める
consensus	総意、合意	variable	変わりやすい、不安定な



Japan and the United States _____ different _____ what it means to be a good communicator in business. Such differences often come _____ the history of each country.

Since Japan is an island society, in most of _____ history, it has been _____ the rest of the world and the population _____ to _____. During its thousands of years of _____, Japanese people _____ shared context to become particularly _____ picking up each other’s messages in order to communicate smoothly, maintain relationships, and _____ the community.

By contrast, the United States has been _____ of _____ from all over the world within the last 250 years, all with different histories, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Because they had very little shared context, Americans _____ realize that they needed to make their messages as _____ and clear as possible, with little room for _____ and misunderstanding.

The fact that the USA became one of the lowest-context cultures in the world implies what we need in _____. Due to the increasing globalization, we have a growing opportunity to work with people with different backgrounds. We need to develop a skill to _____ high context to low context communication _____; otherwise, the messages they receive might be different from the messages _____.

Japan and the United States ended up having different conceptions of what it means to be a good communicator in business. Such differences often come from the history of each country. Since Japan is an island society, in most of its history, it has been closed off from the rest of the world and the population grew to be homogenous. During its thousands of years of shared history, Japanese people have generated layers of shared context to become particularly skilled at picking up each other’s messages in order to communicate smoothly, maintain relationships, and preserve harmony within the community.

By contrast, the United States has been shaped by enormous inflows of immigrants from all over the world within the last 250 years, all with different histories, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Because they had very little shared context, Americans soon had to realize that they needed to make their messages as explicit and clear as possible, with little room for ambiguity and misunderstanding. The fact that the USA became one of the lowest-context cultures in the world implies what we need in cross cultural collaboration. Due to the increasing globalization, we have a growing opportunity to work with people with different backgrounds. We need to develop a skill to switch from high context to low context communication as necessary; otherwise, the messages they receive might be different from the messages you meant.

homogenous	同質の、均質な	immigrant	移民
generate	生み出す、作り出す	imply	暗示する、ほのめかす
inflow	流入		



If you work with people from different cultural backgrounds, you will _____ significant differences in many aspects, such as _____ be late, how they _____, and the manner _____ feedback.

We often make the mistake of assuming that all differences, _____, and misunderstandings _____ the individual's personality, _____ are usually the _____ cultural differences. For example, the Japanese _____ decision-making process is quite different from the American top-down approach. _____, the way we _____ make decisions in our own culture seems so obvious and natural that it is difficult to imagine that another culture might do it differently. _____ our own _____, we often _____ that their way is wrong and _____.

However, both consensual and top-down decision-making processes can be effective _____. _____ Each country has developed the most _____ culture _____ environment. In order to _____, we first need to be aware _____ how culture _____. Then, talk about the cultural differences that influence your style. We can avoid problems by explaining and understanding what seems natural and comfortable to each side. Working in _____ is challenging, but it is also a _____ experience _____ and discoveries.

If you work with people from different cultural backgrounds, you will encounter significant differences in many aspects, such as what it means to be late, how they build trust, and the manner of providing feedback.

We often make the mistake of assuming that all differences, conflicts, and misunderstandings are rooted in the individual's personality, when they are usually the product of cultural differences. For example, the Japanese consensual decision-making process is quite different from the American top-down approach. Yet, the way we are conditioned to make decisions in our own culture seems so obvious and natural that it is difficult to imagine that another culture might do it differently. Trapped in our own cultural bias, we often end up thinking that their way is wrong and inefficient.

However, both consensual and top-down decision-making processes can be effective under specific conditions.

Each country has developed the most suitable culture for its own environment.

In order to collaborate effectively, we first need to be aware of how culture impacts us. Then, talk about the cultural differences that influence your style. We can avoid problems by explaining and understanding what seems natural and comfortable to each side. Working in a diverse community is challenging, but it is also a remarkable experience full of endless surprises and discoveries.

encounter	直面する、出会う	obvious	明らかな、言わずもがな
root / be rooted in	根ざす、基づく	inefficient	効率の悪い、容量の悪い
consensual	合意の上の、総意による		