

# Unit 3

## Barriers in Intercultural Communication

What is intercultural communication? Why do we study intercultural communication? What are the barriers to smooth intercultural communication? These questions may challenge you but after reading the materials in this unit, you will have a clear picture of intercultural communication, its focus and its development history. The main point is that intercultural communication has become more and more essential because companies are expanding their businesses into global markets, governments are negotiating across borders and millions of people are studying and working in countries other than their native ones. Hopefully, you will feel a need to develop intercultural competence, with which you can deal with cultural differences when you face them.

### What You Can Learn from This Unit

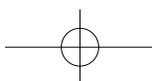
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1. Understand culture, communication and intercultural communication;
2. Know the relationship between globalization and intercultural communication;
3. Gain insight into the nature of mobility and its impact on communication;
4. Become aware of the diverse factors influencing the development of intercultural communication;
5. Understand the barriers to intercultural communication.

### Questions for Intercultural Awareness

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1. What role does intercultural communication play in the age of globalization, and what effect does globalization have on intercultural communication?
2. What is the value of diversity in doing business?
3. Are cultural gaps becoming wider or narrower along with globalization? How can people bridge the gap effectively between different cultures?



## What's Wrong?

### A Clash of Cultures in Toyota's Recall Hearing

Akio Toyoda's appearance before U.S. legislators on February 24, 2010 represents not just a fact-finding mission by committee members and a public relations move by Toyota, but a clash of cultures that in many ways created the recall controversy.

They turned a rather ordinary recall into a brand-threatening crisis. Indeed, a key reason why Toyoda is in the hot seat is that the company leadership responded in a very Japanese fashion. The cultural conflicts in Toyota's recall hearing can be classified as follows:

#### **Decision-Making Process and Group-Oriented Culture**

Toyota's decision-making process is painfully slow, but the international media and concerned customers don't want to wait so long for answers. Anytime the public hears "brake" and "problem" in the same sentence, they want quick answers.

Toyota's long silence in the hearing is a hallmark of the Japanese culture's emphasis on consensus building. In Japan the decision-making process is really the planning process, so you don't see a lot of rapid response to a strategic issue.

#### **Individual Responsibility and Group Responsibility**

In harmony-loving Japan, company heads are rarely management professionals, and are picked more to be cheerleaders for the rank-and-file.

In a Japanese company, the top man isn't the one calling the shots. He is looked up to as a symbol, a bit like the emperor. That's why Japanese company policies don't ever change even if presidents change.

Given such differences in corporate cultures between Japan and the U.S., it wasn't unusual that Toyoda initially said his U.S. executives were the best people to testify at the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Toyota's recalls, now reaching 8.5 million vehicles globally for sticky gas pedals,

braking glitches and faulty floor mats.

In three news conferences, Toyoda has stayed true to form as a Japanese president and left the details of the defects and quality measures to another executive. He has focused on sending the message that he is sincere and ready to correct where the esteemed “Toyota Way” of production has gone astray.

As Japanese companies are group-oriented, don’t look to one person to steer a company, unlike the West, where executives are hired for ideas and leadership.

Japanese presidents are team leaders who coordinate everyone’s views and care intensely about peer opinion because confrontation must be avoided.

Japan has a special phrase to describe such behind-the-scenes consensus-building, *nemawashi*, which translates as “laying the groundwork.” Neglecting *nemawashi* is considered a foolish and sure way to walk into failure.

*Nemawashi* is bureaucratic and time-consuming, but once a decision is made, everyone is on the same page, and action proceeds quickly without infighting.

There is usually no strong leader, who can push radical change within a Japanese firm.

Japanese managers build their careers by moving up within the company and it is unusual for top executives to be recruited from outside the company. That makes for insular management that may be clueless about what’s happening outside their companies.

### **Cultural Differences in Media Coverage**

There is a huge difference in how Japanese media cover companies. They are careful not to upset or annoy business leaders too much, because they don’t want their access to information or press conferences blocked because of negative reporting.

In the West, big, successful companies like Microsoft, Google or GM are targets of aggressive media. That’s the trade-off for visibility and success.

### **American Direct and Japanese Indirect Cultures**

How the Americans and the Japanese view Toyoda’s performance at the congressional hearing may be very different because of cultural differences in body language.

Japanese people, when in an apology mode—especially before an authority like the U.S. Congress—will be very humble. That means Toyoda didn't try to look people in the eye when he was answering questions from congressional leaders. From a Western perspective, that can be mistaken as weakness or perhaps trying to hide something.

Also, Japanese language tends to be indirect. The committee members peppered him with direct questions and “be a bit of political theater.” In response to the questions, Toyoda should have stuck to the key message that he will put customers first, do everything it takes and won't allow this to happen again.

Toyoda has got to walk a very fine line of polite respect—which Japanese have in bucket loads—and the confidence of being head of one of the largest, most respected companies in the world.

### Discussion

1. Discuss the cultural differences that can shape Americans' and the Japanese's behavior.
2. What would happen if people are ignorant of cultural differences in intercultural communication?

## Reading 1

### Experiencing Intercultural Communication

Communicating with someone from a different cultural background can be exciting and scary, frustrating and enlightening. It can be confusing and overwhelming, but it can also be a learning experience. And there is no one “right” way to experience intercultural interaction. You live in an increasingly diverse society, which means that you will experience many intercultural

interactions. New means of communication, as well as new ways of thinking about culture and communication, make it a truly challenging time to live in.

Why is it important to focus on intercultural communication and to strive to become better at this complex form of interaction? We can suggest six reasons, or imperatives, to study intercultural communication: economics, technology, demographics, peace, self-awareness, and ethics. (This excerpt will focus on the first two imperatives.)

### **The Economic Imperative**

You may want to know more about intercultural communication because you foresee tremendous changes in the workplace in the coming years. This is one important reason to know about other cultures and communication patterns. In addition, knowing about intercultural communication is strategically important for U.S. businesses in the emerging transnational economy. Intercultural scholars Bernardo Ferdman and Sari Brody observe that “increasing globalization and a more diverse domestic workforce are push factors (Organizations that do nothing will lose ground), whereas the benefits to be had from working effectively across differences are pull factors (Organizations that take advantage, it is argued, will do better and be more competitive).”

***The Workplace*** Given the growing cultural diversity in the United States, businesses necessarily must be more attentive to diversity issues. As the workforce becomes more diverse, many businesses are seeking to capitalize on these differences: “Once organizations learn to adopt an inclusive orientation in dealing with their members,<sup>1</sup> this will also have a positive impact on how they look at their customer base, how they develop products and assess business opportunities, and how they relate to their communities.” Benefiting from cultural differences in the workplace involves not only working with diverse employees and employers but also seeing new business markets, developing new products for differing cultural contexts, and marketing products in culturally appropriate and effective ways. From this perspective, diversity is a potentially powerful economic tool for business organizations.

***The Global Economy*** Businesses all around the world are continually

expanding into overseas markets in the process of globalization. They sometimes make more money from overseas sales than from domestic sales. For example, in 2003, Nike made \$5.1 billion in overseas sales compared to \$4.6 billion at home. Signing up big-name athletes like Brazilian soccer star Ronaldo to sell its shoes and clothing has resulted in tremendous sales in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In addition, U.S. and European banks and construction companies are competing for lucrative contracts in the rebuilding of Iraq, where American officials estimate that the country's annual gross national product totaled at least \$29 billion before the war.

However, rampant globalization has many critics who point out the downside of businesses finding cheap labor abroad—U.S. manufacturers have lost more than 2.4 million jobs since 2001, or more than 2,600 jobs a day. Many people blame the Chinese, whose exports to the United States have more than doubled in the past five years, totaling more than \$110 billion in 2002. While U.S. exports to China are rising, they are less than one-fifth of what China shipped to the United States in 2003. After Canada and Mexico, China is the third-largest supplier of goods to the United States.

Opponents say that while globalization is producing great wealth, it is also the cause of growing poverty and inequality on the planet. At the world level, the top 20 percent now has 82 times as much as wealth as the bottom 20 percent, compared to a 30-to-1 ratio in the immediate postwar period.<sup>2</sup> Half the world's people live on less than \$2 a day, and one-fifth live on less than \$1 a day. Also, 800 million are chronically hungry, and new evidence shows that the World Bank (responsible for some of these figures) has, if anything, underestimated the numbers of the destitute. These kinds of inequalities can lead to resentment, despair, and ultimately to intercultural conflicts.

In addition, there are other considerations in understanding the global market. Moving operations overseas to take advantage of lower labor costs has far-reaching implications for corporations. To help bridge the cultural gap, many companies employ cross-cultural trainers, who assist people going abroad by giving them information about and strategies for dealing with cultural differences; such trainers report that Japanese and other business personnel often spend years in the United States studying English and learning about the country

before they decide to build a factory or invest money here. By contrast, many U.S. companies provide little or no training before sending their workers overseas and expect business deals to be completed very quickly. They seem to have little regard for cultural idiosyncrasies, which can cause ill will and mistrust, increase negative stereotypes, and result in lost business opportunities.

In the future, economic development in Japan and other Asian countries (including Singapore, ROK, and China), as well as in Latin America, will create even more demand for intercultural communication. Economic exchanges will drive intercultural interactions. This development will create not only more jobs but also more consumers to purchase goods from around the world—and to travel in that world.

### **The Technological Imperative**

In the 1960s, media guru Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” to describe a world in which communication technology—TV, radio, news services—brings news and information to the most remote parts of the world. Today, people are connected—via answering machines, faxes, e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, and the Internet—to other people whom they have never met face to face.

***Technology and Human Communication*** These monumental changes have affected how we think of ourselves and how we form intercultural relationships. In his book *The Saturated Self*, psychologist Kenneth Gergen describes the changes that occur as technology alters patterns of communication. In past centuries, social relationships typically were circumscribed by how far one could walk, but they evolved with each technological advance—whether it be the railroad, automobile, telephone, radio, TV, or movies. These relationships have now expanded exponentially. We can be “accessed” in many ways, including e-mail, faxes, phone, and express mail, and be involved simultaneously in many different relationships, all without face-to-face contact.

What does this have to do with intercultural communication? Through high-tech communication, we come into contact with people who are very different from ourselves, often in ways we don’t understand. The people we talk to on e-mail networks may speak languages different from our own, come

from different countries, be of different ethnic backgrounds, and have had many different life experiences.

***Mobility and Its Effect on Communication*** Not only do we come in contact with more people electronically these days, but also we come in contact with more people physically. Our society is more mobile than ever before; U.S. families move, on average, five times. Of course, there are still communities in which people are born, live, and die, but this happens far less often than it once did.

Mobility changes the nature of our society, and it also affects the individuals involved. One of the authors of this paper, Judith, remembers moving every few years while she was growing up. She was always facing a new group of classmates at a new school. One year, just prior to attending a new high school, she wrote in diary:

I know that the worst will be over soon. Always changing schools should make me more at ease. It does not. I like to meet strangers and make friends. Once I get to know people, it'll be easier. But I always dread the first day, wondering if I'll fit in, wondering if the other kids'll be nice to me.

Many families move because of divorce. As of 1999, only half of the children lived with both birth mother and birth father—down from nearly three-quarters in 1972. Of the other half, some lived with one parent or in stepfamilies or extended families (such as grandparents), or shuttled back and forth between parents' houses. And some children commute between different geographical regions of the United States. For example, they might spend the summer with Dad in Chicago and the rest of the year with Mom and stepfather in Phoenix. These new family configurations increase intercultural contact as generational, regional, and sometimes cultural differences help frame the cultural notion of what constitutes “family.” Increasing mobility also increases the probability of encountering cultural differences related to food (smelt in Chicago versus Sonoran cuisine in Phoenix), languages, and regional ways of life (riding the EL in Chicago versus driving to strip malls in Phoenix<sup>3</sup>).

Families also relocate for economic reasons. A U.S. company might expand its operations to Mexico and relocate corporate personnel with the company. The rise of the European Union makes it much easier for Europeans to work in other European countries. For example, Irish citizens can work in Belgium, Belgians can work in France, and the French can work in Ireland. Increasing technology and mobility in a shrinking, interdependent world means that we can no longer afford to be culturally illiterate.<sup>4</sup> Rather, we all need to be more aware of cultural differences and learn to bridge those differences. Even people who never move may increasingly encounter others who are culturally different and so need to learn new strategies to communicate with them.

## Vocabulary

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- circumscribe *v.* 限制, 约束  
 chronically *adv.* 长期地  
 configuration *n.* 构造, 结构  
 destitute *adj.* 一无所有的, 贫困的  
 downside *n.* 不足之处, 负面, 缺点  
 exponentially *adv.* 以指数方式, 越来越快地  
 imperative *n.* 动因  
 inclusive *adj.* 包容广阔的  
 lucrative *adj.* 可赚大钱的, 利润丰厚的  
 rampant *adj.* 猖獗的, 肆虐的, 失控的  
 shuttle *v.* 穿梭往返 (两地)

## Notes

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1. Once organizations learn to adopt an inclusive orientation in dealing with their members...  
 本句大意为: 一旦各组织学会包容地和其成员打交道……
2. At the world level, the top 20 percent now has 82 times as much as wealth as the bottom 20 percent, compared to a 30-to-1 ratio in the immediate postwar period.

本句大意为：在当今世界，上层20%的人拥有的财产是底层20%的人的82倍之多，而二战结束初期这一比例是30:1。

3. riding the EL in Chicago versus driving to strip malls in Phoenix

EL 是elevated train的缩写，意为“高架（铁路）列车”；Phoenix是美国亚利桑那州的首府和最大城市，译为“菲尼克斯”或“凤凰城”；strip mall泛指商业购物区。本句大意为：在芝加哥坐高架列车与驾车前往凤凰城的商业购物区相比。

4. Increasing technology and mobility in a shrinking, interdependent world means that we can no longer afford to be culturally illiterate.

culturally illiterate指在文化方面的无知、狭隘。本句大意为：在一个日益收缩和相互依赖的世界里，不断进步的科技及日益频繁的迁移意味着我们不能在文化方面无知，否则要付出代价。

### Discussion from Intercultural Perspectives

1. Intercultural scholars Bernardo Ferdman and Sari Brody put forward the concepts of “push factors” and “pull factors.” Explain the two factors and their relationships.
2. How do you account for the statement “Economic exchanges will drive intercultural interactions”?
3. According to paragraph eight, is it necessary for some companies to employ cross-cultural trainers? Why or why not?
4. Based on your understanding of the two imperatives for intercultural communication study: the economic imperative and the technological imperative, what cities in China have already shared these features? Has intercultural communication in these cities become a daily activity in all areas? Can you give some examples to support your viewpoint?
5. As a student or a future professional in the 21st century, how important is it to know about the barriers existed in intercultural communication? Why do you think so? What would you do right now?

## Reading 2

# Cultural Biases and Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication, by definition, means that people are interacting with at least one culturally different person. Consequently, the sense of security, comfort, and predictability that characterizes communication with culturally similar people is lost. The greater the degree of interculturalness, the greater the loss of predictability and certainty. Assurances about the accuracy of interpretations of verbal and nonverbal messages are lost. Terms that are often used when communicating with culturally different people include “unknown,” “unpredictable,” “ambiguous,” “weird,” “mysterious,” “unexplained,” “exotic,” “unusual,” “unfamiliar,” “curious,” “novel,” “odd,” “outlandish,” and “strange.” As you read this list, consider how the choice of a particular word might also reflect a particular value. What characteristics, values, and knowledge allow individuals to respond more competently to the threat of dealing with cultural differences? What situations heighten the perception of threat among members of different cultural groups? To answer questions such as these, we need to explore how people make sense of information about others as they categorize or classify others in their social world.

### **Ethnocentrism**

All cultures teach their members the “preferred” ways to respond to the world, often labeled “natural” or “appropriate.” Thus people generally perceive their own experiences, which are shaped by their own cultural forces, as natural, human, and universal. The belief that the customs and practices of one’s own culture are superior to those of other cultures is called “ethnocentrism.”<sup>1</sup>

Cultures also train their members to use the categories of their own cultural experiences when judging the experiences of people from other cultures. Our culture tells us that the way we were taught to behave is “right” or “correct,” and that those who do things differently are wrong. William G. Sumner, who first introduced the concept of ethnocentrism, defined it as “the view of things in which one’s own group

is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.”

Ethnocentrism tends to highlight and exaggerate cultural differences. As an interesting instance of ethnocentrism, consider beliefs about body odor. Most Americans spend large sums of money each year to rid themselves of natural body odor. They then replace their natural odors with artificial ones, by using deodorants, bath powders, shaving lotions, perfumes, hair sprays, shampoos, mousse, gels, toothpaste, mouthwash, and breath mints. Many Americans probably believe that they do not have an odor—even after they have routinely applied most, if not all, of the artificial ones in the preceding list. Yet the same individuals will react negatively to culturally different others who do not remove natural body odors and who refuse to apply artificial ones.

Another example of ethnocentrism concerns the way in which cultures teach people to discharge mucus from the nose. Most Americans purchase boxes of tissues and strategically place them at various locations in their homes, offices, and cars so they will be available for use as needed. In countries where paper products have historically been scarce and very expensive, people blow their noses onto the ground or the street. Pay attention to your reaction as you read this last statement. Most Americans, when learning about this behavior, react with a certain amount of disgust. But think about the U.S. practice of blowing one’s nose into a tissue or handkerchief, which is then placed on the desk or into a pocket or purse.<sup>2</sup> Now ask yourself which is really more disgusting—carrying around tissues with dried mucus in them or blowing the mucus onto the street? Described in this way, both practices have a certain element of repugnance, but because one’s culture teaches that there is one preferred way, which is familiar and comfortable, the practices of other cultures are seen as wrong or distasteful.

To be a competent intercultural communicator, you must realize that you typically use the categories of your own culture to judge and interpret the behavior of those who are culturally different from you. You must also be aware of your own emotional reactions to the sights, sounds, smells, and variations in message systems that you encounter when communicating with people from other cultures. The competent intercultural communicator does not necessarily suppress negative feelings, but acknowledges their existence and seeks to minimize their effect on his or her communication. If you are reacting strongly to some aspect of another culture, seek

out an explanation in the ethnocentric preferences that your culture has taught you.

### **Stereotyping**

Journalist Walter Lippmann introduced the term “stereotyping” in 1922 to refer to a selection process that is used to organize and simplify perceptions of others. Stereotypes are a form of generalization about some group of people.<sup>3</sup> When people stereotype others, they make assertions about the characteristics of all people who belong to a given category. The consequence of stereotyping is that the vast degree of differences that exist among the members of any one group may not be taken into account in the interpretation of messages.

Stereotype inaccuracy can lead to errors in interpretations and expectations about the behavior of others. Interpretation errors occur because stereotypes are used not only to categorize specific individuals and events but also to judge them. That is, one potentially harmful consequence of stereotypes is that they provide inaccurate labels for a group of people that are then used to interpret subsequent ambiguous events and experiences involving members of those groups.

### **Prejudice**

Prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> Prejudiced attitudes include irrational feelings of dislike and even hatred for certain groups, biased perceptions and beliefs about the group members that are not based on direct experiences and firsthand knowledge, and a readiness to behave in negative and unjust ways toward members of the group. Gordon Allport, who first focused scholarly attention on prejudice, argued that prejudiced people ignore evidence that is inconsistent with their biased viewpoint, or they distort the evidence to fit their prejudices.

The strong link between prejudice and stereotypes should be obvious. Prejudiced thinking depends on stereotypes and is a fairly normal phenomenon. To be prejudiced toward a group of people sometimes makes it easier to respond to them. We are not condoning prejudice or the hostile and violent actions that may occur as a result. We are suggesting that prejudice is a universal psychological process; all people have a propensity for prejudice toward others who are unlike themselves. For individuals to move beyond prejudicial attitudes

and for societies to avoid basing social structures on their prejudices about groups of people, it is critical to recognize the prevalence of prejudicial thinking.

### Discrimination

Whereas prejudice refers to people's attitudes or mental representations, the term "discrimination" refers to the behavioral manifestations of that prejudice. Thus discrimination can be thought of as prejudice "in action."<sup>5</sup>

Often, biases and displays of discrimination are motivated not by direct hostility toward some other group but merely by a strong preference for, and loyalty to, our own culture. Thus the formation of our cultural identity can sometimes lead to hostility, hate, and discrimination directed against non-members of that culture.

### Vocabulary

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breath mint *n.* 薄荷糖

condone *v.* 宽恕, 原谅 (大多数人认为不道德的行为)

deodorant *n.* (除体臭的)除臭剂, 体香剂

discharge mucus 排出体液

exaggerate *v.* 夸大, 夸张, 言过其实

exotic *adj.* 异国风情的, 外国情调的 (含褒义)

outlandish *adj.* 古怪的, 奇异的

prevalence *n.* 普遍, 盛行, 流行

propensity *n.* 倾向

repugnance *n.* 厌恶, 强烈的反感

weird *adj.* 古怪的, 奇异的

### Notes

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1. The belief that the customs and practices of one's own culture are superior to those of other cultures is called "ethnocentrism."

本句大意为: 认为自己的文化、习俗优于其他文化、习俗的观念被称为“种族(或民族)中心主义”。种族(或民族)中心主义是一种主观主义的态度: 偏爱本群体的生活方式, 以自己的生活方式为标准, 否定或贬低其他群体的生活方式和文化成就。其实, 每一种文化都具有其独创性和充分的价值, 每一种文化都是一个不可重复的独立的体系。一切文化价值都是相对

的, 各种族(或民族)文化在价值上是相等的。种族(或民族)中心主义是跨文化沟通的障碍, 是一种应该摒弃的思想观念。

2. But think about the U.S. practice of blowing one's nose into a tissue or handkerchief, which is then placed on the desk or into a pocket or purse.

本句大意为: 但是想一想美国人的习惯, 他们用纸巾或者手帕擤鼻涕, 然后把用过的纸巾或者手帕放在桌子上, 或者装进口袋或钱包里。作者在本段例举了不同国家(地区)的人们清洁鼻腔的做法, 解释种族(或民族)中心主义的弊端。

3. Stereotypes are a form of generalization about some group of people.

stereotype指刻板印象, 是跨文化交际理论中的一个重要概念。本句大意为: 刻板印象是指对某类人群的一种(比较固定的)笼统的概括。

4. Prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.

prejudice在本文中特指文化偏见。本句大意为: 文化偏见是指基于错误、陈旧的刻板印象而形成的对他人的消极态度。

5. Whereas prejudice refers to people's attitudes or mental representations, the term "discrimination" refers to the behavioral manifestations of that prejudice. Thus discrimination can be thought of as prejudice "in action."

本句大意为: 偏见指对人们的态度或心理表征, 而“歧视”则是这种偏见心理的行为表现。因此, 歧视行为可以理解为人们将偏见心理“付诸行动”。

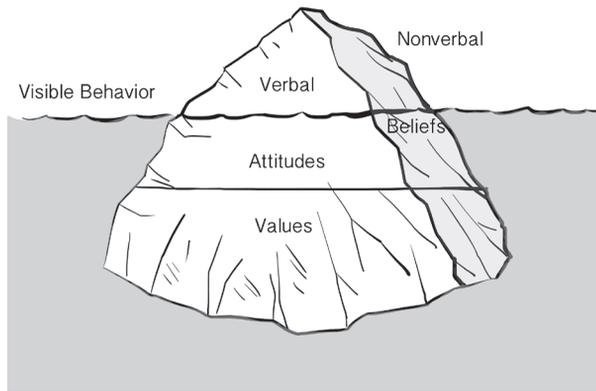
### Discussion from Intercultural Perspectives

1. In what way does ethnocentrism become a barrier to communication? Why is it difficult to see our own ethnocentrism? Discuss the impact of ethnocentrism on communication.
2. Can you list the phenomena reflecting stereotypes held by foreigners and yourself when you communicate with them?
3. What are the differences and similarities among ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination? Discuss their features with examples.

# Intercultural Lens

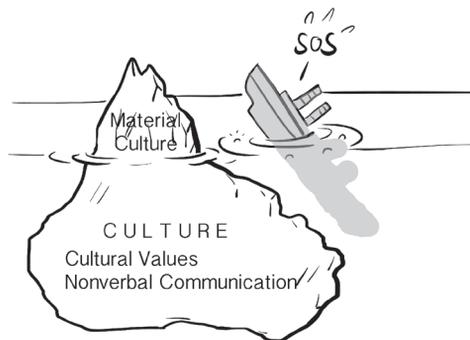
The pictures and diagrams below feature the relationship between language, communication and culture. Look at each picture and interpret it from an intercultural perspective. Specific requirements and questions are stated under each picture and diagram.

## Culture Is Like an Iceberg



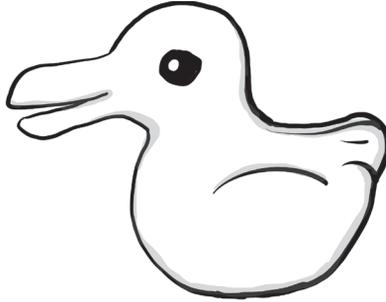
Explain what “Culture is like an iceberg” means to you.

## What Goes Wrong with the Ship



Analyze the barriers in intercultural communication.

### Different Perception



What do you see from the picture and what does it mean to you? Can you see this picture from a totally different perspective?



What are they talking about and what does each refer to?

### Common Ground for Perception



What does shared knowledge mean in terms of intercultural communication?

### Mascot for 2008 Beijing Olympic Games



When the mascot for 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was translated into English (see above), the English version was put on the Beijing Olympic Games Committee website. Right after its appearance people started to argue against its English translation *Friendlies*. One year later, this version was taken off from the Committee website and replaced by a new version *Fuwa* (see below), which ended the argument for the mascot translation.



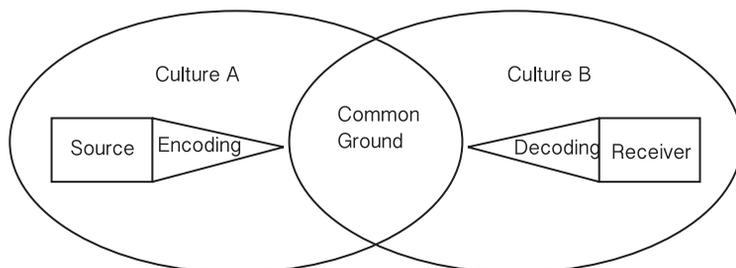
- 1) What might be the interpretation of *Friendlylies* for 福娃 by English speakers?
- 2) What's your view of *Fuwa* for 福娃 in its translation?
- 3) Discuss the differences between the two translation versions and tell what you can learn from it.

### Mascot for the Shanghai World Expo



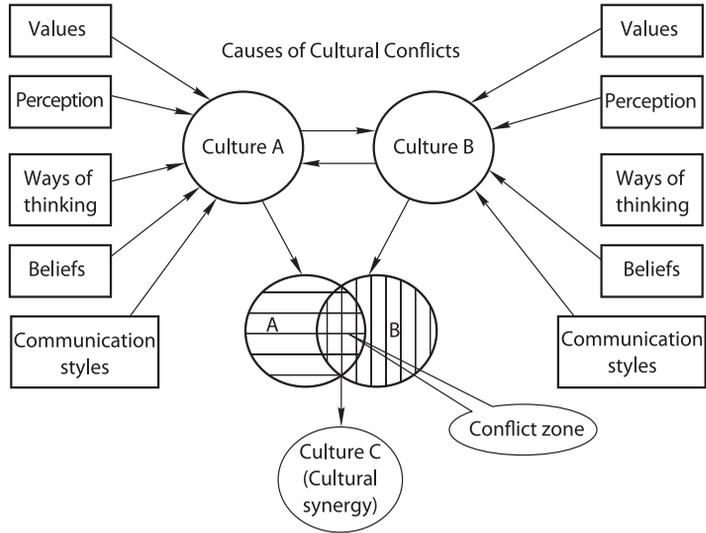
- 1) What is the English version of 海宝?
- 2) What do you think of its translation and why do you think so?

### A View from a Managerial Perspective



Look at the diagram. Suppose Culture A is Chinese Culture and Culture B is Western Culture. If you view this diagram from a managerial perspective, what is your understanding of the common ground between Culture A and Culture B? Does it mean that this is something two cultures share? In this case, we can conclude that the more common ground two cultures share, the fewer differences they keep. Therefore, to be effective in intercultural communication, we need to develop more common ground.

### A View from an Intercultural Perspective



Look at the diagram. When people from two different cultures (Culture A and Culture B) are working together, say in a Sino-U.S. company, are they in the common ground area, which means they share everything when they are working together as stated before (see “A View from an Managerial Perspective”)? Or are they in the conflict zone as shown in this diagram?

Discuss the feature of Culture C in this diagram and why Culture C can function well in a cross-cultural company management.

Have you noticed that the two diagrams present different views? Discuss the reasons and try to present one convincing argument to tell the difference.

## Intercultural Case Study

### A Clash of Cultures in Toyota's Recall Hearing

**A**kio Toyoda, the grandson of the founder of Toyota, and Yoshimi Inaba, the company's North American president, appeared on February 24, 2010 before the House Oversight Committee to offer an apology and explanation for the defects that have caused their vehicles to sometimes accelerate out of control.

Throughout hours of testimony, Toyoda and Inaba used words such as "shameful" when describing past events, and "modestly" and "humbly" to describe how they will approach their responsibility for safety in the future.

Toyoda reminded the committee that he is in some ways the human embodiment of the car company, and that he, more than anyone, would want to repair the damage.

"All the Toyota vehicles bear my name," Toyoda said in his opening statement. "When the cars are damaged, it is as though I am, as well."

The day didn't start well for the automaker.

"There is striking evidence that the company was at times more concerned with profit than with customer safety," Towns said.

Then Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood excoriated the company for being "safety deaf"—that is, not hearing and reacting to the numerous complaints of customers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has said that as many as 39 deaths may be linked to unintended acceleration in Toyota vehicles.

But through demeanor and apology, Toyoda and Inaba seemed to defuse at least some of the anger.

"I am deeply sorry for any accidents Toyota drivers have experienced," Toyoda said.

Again: "I sincerely regret accidents."

And when pressed later on the problems, he offered, "Truly speaking, truly, I feel very sorry for the members of the Saylor family who ended their life with Toyota vehicles. I extend the condolences from the deepest part of my heart."

So how did the famed automaker lose its way? Toyoda even seemed to line up with what has been a popular theory among business analysts in recent weeks.

"Toyota has, for the past few years, been expanding its business rapidly," he said. "Quite frankly, I fear the pace at which we have grown may have been too quick."

LaHood and some lawmakers suggested that one of the company's key problems may have been arrogance, or at least a refusal to hear in Japan what drivers in the United States were saying.

Toyota North America has "some great people there, very professional, good people. We work with them. They make recommendations to Japan," LaHood said. "The decisions are made in Japan."

Some lawmakers referred to the cultural divide between the two nations and the way their governments and corporations operate.

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton asked LaHood about the "notorious" culture of secrecy in Japan and wondered if he and the NHTSA had trouble "penetrating that culture" when investigating Toyota's troubles.

"Yes, we've had some issues," LaHood said. "That's why I picked up the phone and talked personally to Mr. Toyoda."

"I said, 'Look, this is serious,'" LaHood recalled. "'Lives are being lost.' Right after that, they started taking action."

And LaHood said that as U.S. officials recognized a problem last year, Transportation Department Acting Administrator Ron Medford had to travel to Toyota to speak to top company officials “because he didn’t think his message was getting to Japan.”

LaHood said he upbraided Toyota officials.

“My point is this: Their business model is this—there are a lot of good people in North America, but the decisions are made in Japan,” LaHood said.

Others blamed a lack of ethnic diversity in the automaker’s management.

“It is my understanding that there are no Americans in the top leadership in Japan,” said Representative John “Jimmy” Duncan, Jr. “It might be a good idea to put a couple Americans in the top leadership in Japan.”

On the other hand, Representative Geoff Davis, who has a Toyota plant in his home district, complained that the Toyota investigation felt like a witch hunt. He lauded Toyota executives for the “cultural transformation” that his district has undergone, thanks to the company’s presence.

Still, the Toyota executives seemed to elude the thunderous condemnations that congressional hearings sometimes evoke. In part, this may have been because of Toyoda’s translator—it added a delay and sometimes confusion. Some members thanked Toyoda for having traveled so far. And at least two members of the panel offered *konnichiwa*.

But Toyota boosters thought Congress had been rude. Paul Atkinson, who represents a Toyota council of dealers, apologized to Toyoda and Inaba for how some congressional leaders asked questions.

“We apologize for the embarrassing way some members of Congress treated you these last few days,” he said. “If Bill Gates had been treated the way you were in your country, imagine what would happen. We sincerely apologize.”

Aside from the apology, Toyoda offered that the company will add a step to its recall process that will take account of customer safety and that it will form a “quality advisory group” that he will lead, and he said he will establish a new position of “product safety executive.” Moreover, he said that he will ensure that members of the management team “actually drive the cars.” But more than anything, he seemed to say, there would be a change in attitude.

“We will listen to customer complaints humbly,” he said.

### Analyzing the Issues in the Case

1. Work in groups of three or four and discuss this story from intercultural perspectives to discover cultural differences behind the testimony.
2. By analyzing the way Toyoda responded to questions and the way Americans asked questions, what cultural differences can you find out?
3. After analyzing this case from the media, you must have increased your intercultural sensitivity, can you find more examples in your real life?



### Learning Culture Through Proverbs

Work in pairs and exchange views on the meanings of the following proverbs, then try to find out their Chinese equivalents if there is any, and discuss the values transmitted.

**Proverb 1:** *Don't go near the water until you learn how to swim.*

**Proverb 2:** *He who would climb the ladder must begin at the bottom.*



### Online Research—Using Key Words

For more information and resources, search the Internet with the following key words:

*barriers in intercultural communication, ethnocentrism, stereotype*