Cultural Dimensions of Engagement

Use and Meaning of Silence

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In some cultures, people tend to speak at a steady unbroken pace, with a fairly quick *"turnaround time"* when responding to questions or statements. The steady pace and quick responsiveness is taken as a positive indicator of attentiveness, honesty *("with nothing to hide")* or a willingness to be fully engaged.	In other cultures, people may frequently pause before (or even while) offering a response to a statement or question. The use of silence or wait time is taken as a positive indicator of the reflective quality in the responder.

Demonstrative vs. Non-Demonstrative Expression

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In some cultures, communication tends to be demonstrative. *"Normal communication"* may involve animated facial expressions, hand and body motions/gestures, variations in volume or tone of voice, and/or unrestrained laughter or weeping when expressing joy, sorrow, disagreement, affection, or anger.	In other cultures, communication tends to be limited in how demonstrative it is; and rather relies more on verbal expression. Normal communication may involve a modulated tone of voice and limited use of gestures—even in some intimate and/or family relationships.

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Formal vs. Informal Interaction

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In some cultures, formal interaction is the preferred mode of communication – sometimes even between family members or good friends. Formalities in gestures or forms of address are used to acknowledge status or the dynamics of hierarchy between players, and to set everyone at ease because everyone knows his/her role.	In other cultures, informal interaction is the preferred mode of communication, even in official or professional settings. The use of first names in introductions, casual greetings, and/or frequent smiling and use of humor are common behaviors intended to reduce the sense of *"hierarchy",* and to set everyone at east by establishing a friendly and casual atmosphere.

Task Focus vs. Relationship Focus

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In some cultures, people are expected to *"get right down to business"* for appointments or planned events. While *"chit-chat"* is sometimes used to break the ice, it is generally very limited in time and scope--taking the form of a few pleasantries before proceeding right to the task at hand.	In other cultures, people are expected to devote time to cultivating a 'connection' in relationship before getting to the task at hand. Devoting time to demonstrating respect, genuine interest in the other through friendly conversation and hospitality by the hosting party when possible is just as essential as (and perhaps a prerequisite to) getting the task done.

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