

Cultural Differences in Business  
 Gayle Nelson, December, 2006

It is my belief that you can never understand other cultures. Those who are married know that it is impossible ever completely to understand even people of their own (p. 1).<sup>1</sup>

**Relationships with People**

**Recognizing the Differences**

<p><u>Universalism (rules)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus is more on rules than relationships.</li> <li>• Legal contracts are readily drawn up.</li> <li>• A trustworthy is one who honors his/her word or contract.</li> <li>• A deal is a deal.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Particularism (relationships)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus is more on relationships than rules.</li> <li>• Legal contracts are readily modified.</li> <li>• A trustworthy is one who honors changing mutualities.</li> <li>• Relationships evolve.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Individualism (individual)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent use of “I” form.</li> <li>• Decisions made on the spot by representatives.</li> <li>• People ideally achieve alone and assume personal responsibility.</li> <li>• Vacations taken in pairs, even alone.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Collectivism (group)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent use of “We” form.</li> <li>• Decisions referred back by delegate to organization.</li> <li>• People ideally achieve in groups which assume joint responsibility.</li> <li>• Vacations in organized groups or with extended family.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Neutral</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not reveal what they are thinking or feeling</li> <li>• May (accidentally) reveal tension in face and posture.</li> <li>• Emotions often dammed up will occasionally explode.</li> <li>• Cool and self-possessed conduct is admired.</li> <li>• Physical contact, gesturing, or strong facial expressions often taboo.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Emotional</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reveal thoughts and feelings verbally and nonverbally</li> <li>• Transparency and expressiveness release tensions.</li> <li>• Emotions flow easily, effusively, vehemently and without inhibition.</li> <li>• Heated, vital, animated expressions admired.</li> <li>• Touching, gesturing and strong facial expressions common.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Specific</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct, to the point, purposeful in relating.</li> <li>• Precise, blunt, definitive and</li> </ul>	<p><u>Diffuse</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect, circuitous, seemingly “aimless” forms of relating.</li> <li>• Evasive, tactful, ambiguous, even</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Trompenaars, F. (1993). Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business. London: Nicholas Brealey.

<p>transparent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principles and consistent moral stands independent of person being addressed.</li> </ul>	<p>opaque.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly situational morality depending upon the person and context encountered.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Achievement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of titles only when relevant to the competence you bring to the task.</li> <li>Respect for superior in hierarchy is based on how effectively his or her job is performed and how adequately their knowledge.</li> <li>Most senior managers are of varying age and gender and have shown proficiency in specific jobs.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Ascription</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive use of titles, especially when these clarify your status in the organization.</li> <li>Respect for superior in hierarchy is seen as a measure of your commitment to the organization and its mission.</li> <li>Most senior managers are male, middle-aged and qualified by their background.</li> </ul>

### Attitudes to Time

#### Recognizing the Differences

Past	Present	Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk about history, origin of the family, business, and nation.</li> <li>Motivated to create a golden age.</li> <li>Show respect for ancestors and older people.</li> <li>Things viewed in the context of tradition or history.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities and enjoyments of the moment are most important.</li> <li>Plans are not objected to, but rarely executed.</li> <li>Show intense interest in present relationships.</li> <li>Everything viewed in terms of its contemporary impact and style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Much talk of prospects, potentials, aspirations, future achievements.</li> <li>Planning and strategizing done enthusiastically.</li> <li>Show great interest in the youthful and in future potentials.</li> <li>Present and past used, even exploited, for future advantage.</li> </ul>