

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the frame, creating a modern, dynamic feel.

# **Intercultural Communication and Business**

# Individualism versus Collectivism

- ▶ Many cultures (such as American, European) are individualistic, while others (such as many cultures in Asia, in Central and South America) are **collectivist**—that is, they place more importance on the individual in relation to groups. How does this difference play out in work situations?
- ▶ In countries with individualistic views, workers are expected to perform certain functions with clearly defined responsibilities; a clear boundary exist between their job and another person's job. In collectivist countries like Japan, the opposite is true.

## *Work and Material Gain*

- ▶ Most Americans think that hard work is a virtue that will eventually pay off. To the people of many other cultures, however, work is a necessary burden.
- ▶ Cultural groups that see work as having a low priority believe that, because WORK is necessary and takes up most of the daylight hours, ways should be found to make it more agreeable by creating a convivial workplace.
- ▶ The different attitudes toward work can lead to intercultural communication conflicts in the workplace.

# Quality versus Efficiency

- ▶ Another conflict in work-related values is based on the relative value placed on quality versus efficiency and practicality. For most Americans, efficiency and getting the job done for the lowest cost are the ultimate goals. However, people in many different cultures hold different views. For example, the French are more interested in designing. Germans insist on quality, as both producers and consumers. Quality may come at a high price, but the German view is that people will pay for the best quality and that as a worker it's important to do the best job on principle.
- ▶ These differences in priorities can lead to intercultural conflict.

# Task versus Relationship Priority

- ▶ A related value has to do with whether the highest priority is placed on relationships or on task completion. In most work contexts in the United States, the most important thing is to accomplish the task. It is not necessary to like the people one works with. However, in many cultures, work gets done because of relationships. Cultural differences in task versus relationship priorities can cause much frustration in international work settings.

# Language Issues

- ▶ Language issues can come into play in various ways in business contexts. With the growing cultural diversity in the workplace comes linguistic diversity. To make working with a multilingual workforce easier, don't assume that, just because people are speaking a language other than English, they are talking about you.
- ▶ A second suggestion in working with a multilingual workforce is to speak simple, but not simpleminded, English." Many times humor is based on puns and word play, which seldom translate into another language; what one culture considers funny, another might consider not funny, or even rude or crude.
- ▶ Finally, be culturally sensitive. The more you know about the cultures of others, the easier it will be for you to speak with a foreigner who knows only a little of your language.

# Communication Styles

- ▶ **Several elements of communication style are especially relevant in business contexts. These include indirect versus direct, high versus low context, and honesty versus harmony.**

# Indirect versus Direct

- ▶ Exchange of information is important in many work settings, especially when a problem exists and information is needed to solve it. People with a direct communication style simply ask for information from the appropriate person. However, a person with an indirect style might not feel comfortable giving the information, particularly when a problem exists and there is a need to save face.



## *High/low context communication*

- ▶ Closely related to indirect/direct communication is the notion of high-and low-context style. Low-context communicators (most U. S. Americans) prefer to make information very explicit—expressed in *words*. On the other hand, high-context communicators (many Asians and Africans) prefer to communicate more of the message *nonverbally* or *contextually*. This difference can result in challenging business encounters.

## *Honesty versus Harmony*

- ▶ Honesty is not always the best policy in intercultural business contexts, form and social harmony may be more highly valued. The focus here is not on truth, per se, but on achieving harmony. Achieving relational harmony in China and many other Asian countries includes the notion of facework, especially the importance of saving another's face. U. S. Americans tend to focus on saving their own face - maintaining self-pride, reputation, and credibility.

# Business Etiquette

- ▶ Business etiquette varies from culture to culture and is related to the differences in values and communication styles discussed previously. In general, most cultural groups tend to be more formal in business contexts than Americans are. For instance, most Europeans greet each other formally with a verbal greeting and a handshake. In fact, in Germany, as many as 20 minutes daily may be devoted to shaking hands, at the beginning of the day and again at the end.
- ▶ Similarly, Latin Americans attach great importance to courtesy. In general, when conducting business in most cultures, one should be very careful to avoid excessive familiarity, especially in initial meetings; this means no slouching, putting one's feet up on a desk, or lounging in general. This emphasis on formality can extend to language use.