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# UNIT 1: COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit you will learn:

- What is culture
- the importance of culture in business communication
- the impact of culture on business functions such as greetings, introductions, negotiations etc.
- approach to business in the US
- cultural aspects of behavior at meetings in the US
- to write a cultural profile of India
- about phrasal verbs and to + infinitive

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## 1.1 WARM UP

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### Activity 1

Read these two famous quotes on culture

- 1 *'No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive.'*  
**Mahatma Gandhi**
- 2 *'Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.'*  
**Jawaharlal Nehru**

Now read these two statements and match them with the quotes above.

- i Culture helps us to develop and grow as human beings and as communities.
- ii Cultures benefit a lot through interaction with other cultures.

### Activity 2

Look at these pictures. What comes s to your mind about cultural diversity and richness? Make a list of these and later compare them with what you have learnt about culture after you have completed your study of this unit.



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## 1.2 READING

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Read the text given below and answer the questions that follow.

- a To be able to communicate across cultures it is important to know and understand the cultural background of the person you need to communicate with. Intercultural communication principles guide the process of exchanging meaningful information across cultural boundaries, in a way that preserves mutual respect and minimizes ill feeling or misunderstanding.
- b Globalization has brought the world closer together and helped to reduce cultural diversity. Yet globalization also makes it necessary for us to study and understand cultures that are different from ours.

In a country like India, which has 18 major languages, over 200 dialects, 4 major religions, 28 states and 7 union territories, weather ranging from  $-35^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+45^{\circ}\text{C}$ , there is an unusual diversity of culture

which impacts the way we express ourselves and reach out to people who are different from us in many ways.

To begin with one needs to understand what constitutes culture. Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. Hofstede has called it 'collective mental programming' or 'software of the mind'.

- c Culture is not just about our food, clothing and behavior; it has a great deal to do with our beliefs, attitudes and values. It is about those aspects of us which are outwardly visible, such as food, language, clothing and behaviour. But it is also about those aspects of us which are not outwardly visible such as attitudes, values and perceptions. Various models have been used to illustrate this concept. It is often likened to an iceberg where only the tangible aspects of our culture are above the surface of water. In fact what is seen outwardly is a result of what we are and what we believe in.

But, simply put, 'culture' refers to a group or community with whom we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world and relate to it.

- d It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender, race, religion or national origin. It also includes groups we join or become part of. For example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status or the society in which we move.

Learning about different cultures and ways that people communicate can enrich our lives infinitely.

### Check your progress 1

To ensure that you have understood the above mentioned ideas on culture and cross cultural communication, it will be worthwhile to consider the questions that the text answers on this topic.

- 1 Read the underlined sentences in the above reading passage carefully and formulate suitable questions to which these sentences could serve as answers. The first one has been done for you.
  - i Why is it important to know the cultural background of the person you communicate with? (para a)
  - ii .....
  - .....?
  - iii .....
  - .....?
  - iv .....
  - .....?
- 2 Now complete these sentences that have been begun for you, based on the information given in the text. Do not copy the text. Use your own words.

- i We can make meaningful conversation with people from other cultures by.....  
.....
  - ii Globalization has helped cross cultural communication by .....  
.....
  - iii In India culture impacts the way we communicate because.....  
.....
  - iv Culture is likened to an iceberg because.....  
.....
  - v Culture can also be indicated through a tree because .....  
.....
  - vi We can acquire a new culture by.....  
.....
- 3 What do these numbers denote in paragraph (C) of the text?
- i 18
  - ii 200
  - iii 4
  - iv 28
  - v 45
- 4 The reading passage here has several word partnerships. Can you make eight word partnerships without looking back at the text? The first one is done for you.
- i cultural background
  - ii intercultural \_\_\_\_\_
  - iii \_\_\_\_\_ information
  - iv cultural \_\_\_\_\_
  - v \_\_\_\_\_ respect
  - vi cultural \_\_\_\_\_
  - vii mental \_\_\_\_\_
  - viii \_\_\_\_\_ experiences
  - ix national \_\_\_\_\_
  - x economic \_\_\_\_\_

### **Activity 3**

Here are some important communication functions that we perform in business or at work. Match them with the statements given in the following

boxes. Additionally these functions also provide valuable inputs on some do's and don'ts about cultural aspects of India that would be helpful for foreigners who wish to do business with India / Indians.

- i     **Negotiating**
- ii    **Appointments**
- iii   **Greetings**
- iv    **Entertaining**
- v     **Introductions**

1

- Men and Westernized Indian women will offer to shake hands with foreign men.
- Western men should not initiate handshakes with Indian women. If Indian women initiate a handshake, then respond with handshake; otherwise perform the traditional Indian greeting, a *namaste*.
- To perform the traditional Indian greeting, *namaste*, hold the palms of your hands together below the chin, and nod or bow slightly.

2

- Titles are highly valued. Advanced degrees (Ph.D.) are listed on business cards and mentioned in introductions.
- Status is determined by age, university degrees and profession.
- There are numerous ethnic/linguistic/religious groups in India. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs generally use different traditional naming conventions.

3

- Late mornings and early afternoons are preferred.
- Meetings are not scheduled during India's numerous religious holidays.

4

- Business is highly personal, and conducted at a leisurely pace.
- The word "no" has harsh implications. Evasive refusals, like "I'll try" are acceptable. Sometimes, 'yes' means 'no'. Make sure to have an expert lawyer trained in Indian and Western legal systems during negotiations.

## Activity 4

Take a close look at these observations on cultural traits and state whether they are more common amongst Indians or Westerners. Remember that there are always exceptions.

- 1 Individual opinions are extremely important.

5

  - Many Indians are vegetarians
  - Hindus do not eat beef and Muslims do not eat pork.
  - Never offer another person food from your plate.
  - Eat with your right hand.
- 2 There are large power distances in workplaces. The powerful have more privileges in business organizations as well as social groups. The source of this power is money as well as status or positions of authority.
- 3 People are often encouraged to deal directly with conflicts that arise.
- 4 A written exchange might be the favoured means to address a conflict.
- 5 Decisions are frequently delegated -- that is, an official assigns responsibility for a particular matter to a subordinate.
- 6 Quick decision making is favoured.
- 7 There are tight rules for what is dirty and taboo. Most of the time the elders tutor the young on what is proper and correct and what is not.
- 8 Children learn to think in terms of “we” rather than “I”.
- 9 Communication style is direct, factual, informal and at times confrontational.
- 10 There is a tendency to avoid direct confrontation in order to maintain harmony.
- 11 Men still continue to dominate in most places although we see some changes in the metropolitan and smaller cities.
- 12 Risk taking is high.
- 13 People pride themselves on their traditions.
- 14 Quick results are expected and so there isn’t much long term planning.
- 15 What people and society says also matters a great deal.

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## 1.3 LISTENING

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### Check your progress 2

The United States is an important business partner of India.

Listen to a speaker sharing information with you about the US (tape script A) and state whether these statements are true or false:

- i Our exports to US are more than our imports.
- ii Most business decisions in US are made on scientific analysis.
- iii People often change jobs and therefore don’t give their best to any company or place of work.

### Check your progress 3

Now listen to another speaker tell you about meetings in America (tape script B) and answer the given questions:

- 1 Meetings in US aggressive and confrontational because
  - i people are not as polite as in other cultures
  - ii people don't value personal relationships
  - iii people like to debate issues in a frank and forthright manner
- 2 People often include presentations in meetings
  - i to show their ability to perform and deliver
  - ii to save time
  - iii to make things clear
- 3 Coded speech is discouraged because it is
  - i misleading
  - ii a waste of time
  - iii difficult to understand
- 4 In an impasse
  - i people prefer to argue things out frankly
  - ii abandon the discussion temporarily
  - iii call off the meeting to restore harmony

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## 1.4 WRITING

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### Activity 5

Write down a cultural profile of India based on the pictures that you see below. Now compare your profile with the one given in the 'Answers' section. Note how similar or different your profile is to the given sample.









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## 1.5 SPEAKING

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### Activity 6

Here are some culturally significant traits of business behavior. Look at these points and discuss with your partner / friend, how these may vary amongst people from different cultural backgrounds. Give examples from your own experiences to explain the characteristics of your culture.

- i Using first names
- ii How you dress at work
- iii Punctuality
- iv Humour
- v Socializing with business colleagues outside work
- vi Topics for small talk
- vii Giving gifts
- viii Showing emotion at work
- ix Working extra hours
- x Degrees of formality / informality for different levels of authority

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Use the following expressions in your conversation:

I think it's a good idea to .....because.....

People tend to / tend not to.....because.....

On the whole most people like to.....because.....

A lot of people.....but I don't because.....

.....is just not done.....because.....

It is generally appreciated if you avoid.....because.....

One thing you should never do is.....because.....

It is considered bad to.....because.....

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## 1.6 VOCABULARY: PHRASAL VERBS

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A phrasal verb is a verb plus a preposition or adverb which creates a meaning different from the original verb.

For example:

I **ran into** my old college mate at the conference.

In the next phase of our expansion we will be **looking at** the European market.

### Activity 7

1 Replace the phrasal verbs with the words given below:

- i You often **come across** people who think and behave differently from you.
- ii Americans may sometimes **come across** as rude when they are actually being direct and confrontational.

- iii You may need to **tone down** your language when you talk to people from the east.
- iv A **break down** in communication happens more easily if you have no understanding of the culture of the person you are talking to.
- v It becomes difficult **to bring around** someone you have annoyed unknowingly.
- vi During small talk you must avoid **bringing up** controversial topics with strangers.
  
- a persuade
- b meet
- c make less aggressive
- d appear to be
- e to raise
- f lapse

2 Now complete these sentences with appropriate phrasal verbs from the box:

get along	come up	look up	break down
call on	go along	run into	get into

- i You must take steps to avoid .....trouble while doing business with foreigners.
- ii A lack of understanding can lead to a ..... in business interaction.
- iii In a global environment you need to ..... with people of diverse cultures.
- iv You have to learn to ..... with people who behave differently from you.
- v It's a good idea to ..... some useful and relevant information about your new foreign clients.
- vi In spite of your best preparation you may still ..... problems while dealing with people from other countries.
- vii The important thing is to ..... with solutions.
- viii Before you ..... someone in a new place it might help if you found out about social protocol.

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## 1.7 GRAMMAR: THE PASSIVE VOICE

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Read the sentences given below which are taken from the Reading text:

- i Various models have been used to illustrate this concept.
- ii .....and are told that the person you want to speak to is not available.
- iii You may need to take a message for some one...

The verbs to give, to speak, to take are infinitives. Although the infinitive is a verb, it is often used as a noun. It can be the subject or the object of a verb. In sentences, 1, 2, and 3 the infinitives **to illustrate**, **to speak** and **to take** are objects of the verbs **used**, **want** and **need**, respectively.

The infinitive can also be used as a subject of a verb or a complement of a verb or an object.

Examples:

To ensure that you have understood the above mentioned ideas on culture and cross cultural communication, it will be worthwhile to consider the questions that the text answers on this topic. (subject of *have understood*)

His job is to repair old cars. (used as a complement)

## Activity 8

1 Complete the sentences with the infinitives of the verbs in the box:

complete	quit	Hire	meet
ask	buy	contact	weigh

- i Please do not hesitate .....me if you have further queries.
- ii I am writing .....you for your help.
- iii I have arranged ..... the visitors at the factory.
- iv We use scales ..... things.
- v I stayed up late ..... my Project Report.
- vi I went shopping last Sunday ..... gifts for our buyers from London.
- vii There are a lot of companies who want ..... engineers for short term projects.
- viii Marie was getting tired of her job so she decided ..... it.

2 Rewrite the following sentences using the verbs in the brackets given below + **object** + **to** + **infinitive**. One is done for you as an example:

- i "You may leave early if you like," said the Manager to his secretary. (allow)
- ii "Don't forget to send the email," said the team leader. (remind)
- iii "Go on, apply for the job," said Anita's husband. (encourage)
- iv "Can you finish the report as soon as possible?" said the Finance Manager to his team. (ask)
- v "I think you should inform the GM about the theft," said the Manager. (advise)
- vi "If you want to get good Indian food, go to Just Indian," said Rohan to the buyers. (recommend)

- i Allow: The Manager allowed his secretary to leave early.
- ii .....
- iii .....
- iv .....
- v .....

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## **1.8 PRONUNCIATION: PACE OF DELIVERY**

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In order to be intelligible to the listener the speaker has to pay attention to the speed of his delivery. If we convey our message at a rapid speed, the listener may miss its essence or some important links in the sequence. This is likely to result in a breakdown of communication and a concomitant loss of interest in what is being said. Very slow speech, on the other hand, could make the talk / speech/presentation boring. Thus the two extremes would defeat the very purpose of oral communication i.e., transmitting information and interacting.

When we speak to an audience (present or absent) we need to adjust the speed depending on the subject matter, the estimated level of the audience, and the time allotted for the talk / speech / report etc.

If the subject matter the speaker is to talk about is difficult and entirely new to the audience they cannot afford to speak too fast. They would, for instance, need to speak slower when talking about a technical subject than they would if they were talking about a sports event. However, if the audience comprises highly qualified people, we could speak faster.

Another factor that can be important in determining speed is the listener's proficiency in the language used by the speaker. If the level of proficiency is low the speaker would need to reduce his speed.

Familiarity with our audience can influence the speed of our speech. If we address an assembly of friends we can speak faster than we would while addressing strangers. Also, if we have been talking to an audience quite frequently, we need not speak slowly.

Sometimes the time allotted for a talk/speech/report/presentation necessitates an adjustment in the speed of delivery. What we want to say must be said within the allotted time, so we have to speak fast or slow as the case may be. We would be able to speak at normal speed if the content were to be just enough for the time allotted.

Three examples:

- Fast
- Too slow
- Normal

**Said at a fast pace:**

It is often said in high places that engineers exploit the discoveries of scientists and use them for making profit. It is even implied sometimes that this is all they do. Perhaps the simplest counter to this is that the pure sciences, as we now understand them, have a history that stretches back perhaps 200 years (in any concentrated form). Engineering, on the other hand, can be traced back some 30,000 years when primitive men tied logs together with reed ropes to make rafts, and soon learned to harness the wind by putting masts and sails on them.

### **Said very slowly**

Engineering is much more than that. It is concerned with everyday living, often with survival, especially in its more ancient beginnings. Engineering is therefore concerned with common sense as well as ingenuity. When it finally brought affluence, at least to a minority, it was on the first rung of a ladder that it has been climbing ever since-improving the quality of life for all mankind. This involves not only harnessing, but controlling, the natural forces and resources.

### **Normal speed**

For thousands of years the primitive folk we now see as engineering pioneers never thought of themselves in such terms. There were seamen, farmers, soldiers and men of a few other occupations who could clearly be identified as leading quite different kinds of lives. But not until the Industrial Revolution did entirely new 'species' emerge, the men who made machines. They could be seen to be neither soldiers nor sailors, nor had they anything to do with the earth itself. They did not build roads, nor bridge rivers, and yet they had skills in common with those who did.

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## **1.9 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have seen how understanding various cultures is essential for working in today's multicultural workplace, - be it negotiations, greetings or introductions. Knowledge of diverse cultures will enhance these business functions. We have seen how meaningful communication across cultures can bring about successful business relationships. We have also explicated and given you practice in the use of phrasal verbs and to + infinitive.

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## **1.10 ANSWERS**

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### **Activity 1**

- 1 – ii
- 2 – i

### **Check your progress 1**

- ii What has globalization done? OR What has happened due to globalization? (para b)
- iii What is culture? (para c)
- iv What does culture include? (para d)

- 2 Completed sentences:



- i We can make meaningful conversation with people from other cultures by *learning and understanding intercultural communication principles*.
- ii Globalization has helped cross cultural communication by *reducing the distance between countries, people and cultures*.
- iii In India culture impacts the way we communicate because of *our cultural diversity*.
- iv Culture is likened to an iceberg because *only a part of it is outwardly seen*.
- v Culture can also be indicated through a tree because *just like a tree its roots are not visible from the outside*.
- vi We can acquire a new culture by *changing our physical or social environment*.

3 What do these numbers denote in paragraph 3 of the text?

- i 18 – major languages of India
- ii 200 – major dialects spoken in India
- iii 4 – major religions followed in India
- iv 28 – states of India
- v 45 – degrees Celsius, the highest temperature in many parts of India

4 Word partnerships:

- ii intercultural communication
- iii meaningful information
- iv cultural boundaries
- v mutual respect
- vi cultural diversity
- vii mental programming
- viii common experiences
- ix national origin
- x economic status

### Activity 3

- 1 Greetings
- 2 Introductions
- 3 Appointments
- 4 Negotiations
- 5 Entertaining

### Activity 4

Indians: 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15

Westerners: 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 12

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## 1.3 Listening

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## **Tape script A**

The United States accounts for 20% exports and 7% imports of India. It would therefore be useful for us to improve our cultural awareness of USA to ensure that we are competent and successful in doing business with them.

The US is characterized by a 'scientific' approach to business. Every aspect of commercial life is studied and analyzed. The results of all analysis done are taken very seriously and business decisions are often made on the basis of these findings.

Consequently nothing remains constant. Companies are forever making changes for the better and hence the work force is in a state of constant flux. People leave, are fired or made redundant and then reappear in another organization. In spite of this people are loyal to their companies and totally committed.

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## **Check your progress 2**

- i TRUE
- ii TRUE
- iii FALSE

## **Tape script B**

Meetings in the USA are usually 'aggressive', where people are often 'confrontational', openly and directly debating all the relevant issues even at the expense of personal relationships, which is very different to those cultures where diplomacy and harmony govern the approach to meetings.

Meetings often include formal presentations by one or more of the participants and these presentations are a vital element in the demonstration of professional competence. Thus, presentations should not only be relevant and well researched but also delivered in a positive, enthusiastic and committed manner. The meeting and especially one in which a presentation has to be made, is seen as an opportunity to impress — if personal success is to be achieved.

The desire to debate issues directly and openly leads Americans to be seen by some cultures as aggressive and even rude. Coded speech and verbosity is often seen as time wasting and in time pressured corporate USA, that is a crime.

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Thus, when an impasse is reached in meeting situations, the reaction is often to address it directly and 'with feeling.' This direct, robust debate can often be viewed by more harmony seeking cultures as signaling the breakdown of meaningful discussions and as the signal to try to abandon the interaction — whereas in the States it is seen positively and as a sign of definite progress.

## **Check your progress 3**

- 1 iii
- 2 i

### Activity 5

#### Sample Answer (A Cultural Profile of India)

India is a land of many religions and cultures. It is known for the richness of its cultural diversity. Yet there are some common interests that can be found all over India. Two of these are cricket and films. Most Indians enjoy watching cricket as well as Indian films, which are popularly called Bollywood films. However, regional films are also very popular in some of the states of India.

Dance is another performing art which is cherished by many Indians. Some of the dance forms that are popular are – Katak, Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi as well as Kathakali. Besides India is a land of folk culture and the folk dances of Punjab, Gujarat and North East States are very popular.

A cultural profile of India would be incomplete without a mention of festivals. The number of festivals celebrated in India probably outnumber the number of days in the year! Diwali, Holi, Rakhi and Dussehra are some of the popular festivals celebrated by Hindus, Eid and Moharram by Muslims, Baisakhi and Lohri by Sikhs.

India also has a wide variety of cuisines which vary from the Mughlai food of U.P., the rice, lentil and coconut based specialties of the South. The daily meals of most Indians include chapatti, dal, vegetables, curd and salad. A large number of Indians are vegetarians.

### Activity 6

Sample conversation:

**S:** Hi there! I am Shalini. Welcome to NIIP.

**A:** Hello. I am Anu Agarwal. I am from Uttar Pradesh. This is my first visit to the South. What is your full name?

**S:** I'm Shalini Thomas. You can call me Shalini. People here tend to use the first names only. It's more of an informal environment here.

**A:** Oh I see... Back home people tend to call you ma'am or madam if you are senior to them.

**S:** In our company, we call everyone by their first name, no matter how senior they are.

### Activity 7

1 Replacement of phrasal verbs:

- i – b
- ii – d

- iii – c
- iv – f
- v – a
- vi – e

2 Completed sentences:

- i You must take steps to avoid **getting into** trouble while doing business with foreigners.
- ii A lack of understanding can lead to a **break down** in business interaction.
- iii In a global environment you need to **get along** with people of diverse cultures.
- iv You have to learn to **go along** with people who behave differently from you.
- v It's a good idea to **look up** some useful and relevant information about your new foreign clients.
- vi In spite of your best preparation you may still **run into** problems while dealing with people from other countries.
- vii The important thing is to **come up** with solutions.
- viii Before you **call on** someone in a new place it might help if you found out about social protocol.

**Activity 8**

1.

- i to contact
- ii to ask
- iii to meet
- iv to weigh
- v to complete
- vi to buy
- vii to hire
- viii to quit

- 2 ii The team leader reminded him to send the email.
- iii Anita's husband encouraged her to apply for the job.
- iv The Finance Manager asked his team to finish the report as soon as possible.
- v The Manager advised him to inform the GM about the theft.
- vi Rohan recommended the buyers to go to 'Just Indian' for good Indian food.