

The same was true in China. Western businesspeople understand that to build valuable relationships in China, you have to spend the time to develop trust and personal feelings for each other through cooperation, finding shared interests and goals, handling disagreements constructively, and being reliable over a long period of time.

These considerations pose a red flag for twenty-first-century Euro-North American businesspeople. Fast messaging has become the norm in these cultures. It is, however, a culture-laden practice. Even though business cultures in other cultures—China, or India, for example—have adopted it as well, it may not build effective relationships in slow messaging cultures. If, however, we receive emails and texts from our Asian associates, we should not be surprised. There are fast and slow messages in every culture.

Space preferences

Hall and Hall⁴² consider perceptions of appropriate spatial boundaries in terms of territory and personal space. Different cultures also have different conceptions about what constitutes an appropriate amount of personal space. This is the "bubble" of space left between individuals communicating with each other. In northern Europe, these bubbles are quite large, but as you go south to France, Italy, Greece, and Spain, the expected size decreases. A space considered "intimate" in Northern Europe, or for Americans of Northern European ancestry—less than two feet separating—would be considered normal conversing distance between bodies in Southern Europe. In Japan and China, people accept levels of crowding in public spaces that would be considered unacceptable in Europe or North America. Violation of these norms—too close or too far apart—may produce a feeling of discomfort, whether you are conscious of it or not.

Time preferences

Hall and Hall⁴³ distinguish between monochronic and polychronic time. In monochronic cultures such as the US, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan, time is experienced as linear, like a road that goes from past to future. Time naturally divides into segments, and is efficiently scheduled. There is a strong emphasis on using time efficiently and saving it wherever possible. It's almost sinful to lose or waste time. People burdened with priorities learn at time management courses how to handle less important tasks in as little time as possible.

Latin America and Southern Europe are examples of polychronic cultures. They are almost every way the antitheses of monochronic cultures. A much greater emphasis is placed on involvement with people, and one's schedule to complete individual interactions that take longer. Japan is an interesting combination because the culture is monochronic in the way schedules are kept with foreigners, and public transport runs exactly on time. However, interpersonal relationships are often conducted polychronically. Exhibit 2.4 highlights the major differences between the two.

EXHIBIT 2.4

EXHIBIT 2.4 MONOCHRONIC VERSUS POLYCHRONIC PEOPLE

Monochronic people	Polychronic people
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Focus intently on their work	Easy to distract; constantly interrupted
Committed to the job	Committed to people and relationships
Deadlines and schedules rigidly kept	Schedules are objectives, to be kept if possible
Emphasize and expect promptness	Need for promptness depends on the relationship
Tend to be low-context and need lots of background information and context	Tend to be high-context and already know or think they know
Adhere to plans with determination	Plans may change easily
Used to short-term relationships	Build lifelong relationships

Source: Hall, E. T. and Hall, M. R. *Hidden Differences*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1985, pp. 18-19.

Electronic communications media (texting, email, social media, websites, and so on) are far more popular in monochronic cultures because they save time. We should be aware, however, that individuals in polychronic cultures could feel uncomfortable with these technologies or see them as emanating from people that they do not, and will not, have significant relationships with. Therefore, they might not respond as efficiently as we hoped, or might not place as much value on relationships with us because we had not spent the time they preferred in face-to-face contact. Despite the historical tensions Chinese feel about Japanese rather than Western sellers because the Japanese took the time to build personal relationships. If North American sellers sold the Chinese a product, that was the last you saw of them for years until they thought maybe you might need something else. The Chinese called this approach "disposable relationships."⁴⁴ It was also a difference between polychronic and monochronic relationships.

International body language

Do your actions really speak louder than your words? A study by Ting-Toomey⁴⁵ found that up to 65 percent of a message's meaning is sent through body language, or physical signaling. It contributes to at least three reasons for cross-cultural conflict. First, the same signal carries different meanings in different cultures. Second, many nonverbal signals are sent in each interaction, making interpretation ambiguous. Third, personality, gender, socioeconomic status, and the situation may all produce variants in bodily signaling, adding to confusion.⁴⁶ Exhibit 2.5 lists the many types of body language.