◆ 論　文

The Intercultural Management of Cultural Space

Keyword　Management; culture; space perception

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> The study of culture in the proxemic sense is therefore the study of people's use of their sensory apparatus in different emotional states during different activities, in different relationships, and in different settings and contexts.
>
> Edward T. Hall

Introduction

All managers realise that context is vital in intercultural encounters. Our tendency, however, is often to think primarily of social context (business, domestic, academic, recreational) while overlooking the importance of the physical context in which an interaction takes place. In fact, people of dissimilar cultural backgrounds perceive and conceptualise space in very different ways, and these differences, often unconsciously, help to shape values and influence behaviour. By understanding more about the range of culturally conditioned reactions to physical space in its many manifestations we can greatly reduce the potential for misunderstanding and conflict in intercultural situations.

In this paper I shall present a six-part framework for the analysis and discussion of cultural difference in the perception of space. This model is not intended as a complete answer to intercultural misunderstanding, of course, but rather as an initial guide to the different levels, or dimensions, of a physical setting to which a participant may be reacting. Nor am I suggesting that these six levels are discrete entities — they necessarily overlap and affect each other in ways such that no one behaviour or perception can be unequivocally assigned to any one of them; human interaction is far too complex for such completeness. As an approach to this complexity, however, a sequential consideration of space in terms of its personal, residential/occupational, social, environmental, geographical and cosmological aspects may prove to be a useful tool for managers dealing with intercultural issues.

By my first term, personal, I am referring mainly to the concepts of proxemics and nonverbal communication. Every culture has its own rules for such ideas as the proper interpersonal distance between speakers, appropriate posture, gesture, and facial expression, rules that vary both widely and

crucially. A friendly conversational distance for many Arabs would feel uncomfortably intimate for most Westerners, just as the relaxed, hands-in-pockets stance of a Western manager may be seen as inappropriately casual to a Japanese. It was some months into my job as a university teacher in Japan before I discovered that my tieless appearance in the lecture hall was causing many students (and possibly some colleagues) to doubt whether I was taking my job seriously enough. The animated gestures of someone from Southern Europe could be seen as evidence of an overemotional or insufficiently controlled personality by people from more restrained cultural backgrounds, just as a neutral expression could be interpreted as lack of interest by an observer unaware of the differing cultural norms. Who stands (or sits) where in a room, especially in East Asia and parts of Africa, is similarly loaded cultural information, and considerations of this aspect of space lead on to the next level, the residential or occupational.

"First we shape our houses," said Winston Churchill, "and then they shape us." We are all influenced by the immediate physical spaces we occupy, and this insight is just as relevant for our workplaces as for our homes. Concepts of privacy, ownership, and territoriality are powerful influences on us both at home and at work, but their definitions are essentially contingent on cultural background. Edward T. Hall has written of the typical Arab reaction to many Western rooms as 'tomb-like', the lack of access to air and light powerfully evoking feelings counter to the Arab idea of what a living or working space should be. (On a lighter level, the cartoonist Scott Adams, in the 'Dilbert' strip, has delineated with amusing but painful accuracy the psychosocial effects of cubicle culture.) Distinctions between private and public space are clearly cultural in nature, yet infringements of these tacit rules are felt viscerally; our first reaction to such territorial violations is unlikely to be: "Gosh, a different cultural norm. How fascinating!" Signs such as closed doors, seating arrangements, and individual space convey different meanings within cultures, carrying vital information about power and hierarchy, just as the layout of a Japanese office is an immediate visual indication of authority and length of service. As with so much intercultural conflict, participants may be operating under different rules, while assuming that they share the same code.

Human beings are gregarious animals, and tend to live together in societies. Larger societies generally manage to incorporate a wide range of diversity without losing their identity as a recognisable community, but each society accomplishes this by means of its own set of rules and norms, many of these implicit. Inevitably, on crossing from one culture to another, members bring these internalised habits of thought and behaviour with them, often unaware of their unsuitability in the new culture. A relative distinction is often made, in this respect, between High Context and Low Context cultures. In the former, rules are unstated, the assumption being that, having been through a similar socialisation process, everyone knows what the rules are, so there is no need to spell them out. Small communities often fit this model, as do societies with a largely monolingual, monocultural history, such as Japan. In societies toward the Low Context end of this continuum, on the other hand, such as the multicultural United States, norms and agreements have to be made explicit, to account for differences in background and to

avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. Each of these approaches to community would appear initially baffling to an outsider from the 'other side', whether in the context of a neighbourhood or a company, the High Context person possibly being irritated by the need to clarify every last detail, the Low Context newcomer confused by the lack of clear direction.

The environmental frame of space perception refers to the effects of a different physical landscape on people. At a basic level this idea addresses the disorientation experienced by someone moving from, say, a small town in North Dakota to Manhattan, or from tropical Florida to northern Maine. At a more subtle level, though, the landscape exerts a symbolic effect that is entirely dependent on culture. Many scholars have discussed the influence on community formation of the grid-based town planning of the U.S. as compared to more organic, unplanned patterns of urban development in other parts of the world. Also, we tend to assume that ideas of beauty and majesty are universal, and that everyone, irrespective of culture, would enjoy the vista of a soaring mountain range, or a seascape, but responses to landscape are irretrievably bound up in cultural associations — the stories you are told as a child, family histories, exposure to art. A further, more dramatic example of the cultural component in environmental perception is offered by the anthropologist Colin Turnbull, who took his Mbuti friend Kenge out of the rain forest, where he had spent all his life, on a journey to the savannah. Kenge was predictably awed by the too-bright light and the too-big sky, but what really stunned Turnbull was Kenge's inability to recognise antelopes on the plain below for what they were, seeing them as insects. This man, who could discern in the gloom of the rain forest tiny objects that Turnbull could hardly see, nevertheless had not developed a sense of depth perspective, in which objects appear to diminish in size with distance. So much of what we unthinkingly assume to be hard-wired in us is the product of cultural conditioning; our cultures teach us to pay attention to different features of the sensory field.

Our geographical perception of space enables us to locate ourselves and others on the earth, and we think of this sense as factual information rather than a cultural construct. As a Briton, the map of the world I grew up with was centred on the zero meridian, reinforcing my conviction that London was the centre of the world. Japan was very obviously the Far East, and the Pacific Ocean was in two parts, one part at each edge of the map. Even as an adult with some interest in these matters, it was a (literally) disorienting experience to come to Japan and be surrounded by maps centred on the vast Pacific, my home island suddenly at the world's periphery. A further, counter-intuitive shock for many of us accustomed to maps using the Mercator projection is that our ideas about the relative size of landmasses are not based on reality. The combined area of Canada and the United States is less than two-thirds the size of Africa; Alaska is smaller than Mexico; India is more than three times the size of Scandinavia. Even the convention of drawing maps with north at the top is just that, a convention; and many Australians and New Zealanders have tried to promote the use of maps with south at the top, thus giving prominence to their own countries. Clearly, there are political and cultural consequences to such distorted representations, as these internalised geographies tend to reflect relative power. "To those that have strength in

the world," said Brian Harley, "shall be added the strength of the map."

Cosmological perception is perhaps more metaphysical than strictly physical, although the material world is full of signs and referents of cultural cosmology. Although appearing the most abstract of the six dimensions, the cosmological is in fact fundamental, as it is the source of our values. What is the relationship of human beings to the earth? Are we subject to nature, or should nature be adapted to our desires? For many Christians the earth is a temporary abode, heaven being the true home of the soul; the spires of countless churches therefore point to this assumed destination. Many Native Americans and others believe, conversely, that they come from the earth, and return to it at death; their sacred places tend to be grottoes or features of the land, all too easily profaned by sky-oriented trespassers. History gives countless examples of conflict between those who respect the earth as sacred space and those who see it as an exploitable resource, and this conflict is unconsciously replicated in everyday encounters. Even the language we use, especially symbolic and metaphoric language, can convey hidden messages of our cosmological conceptions; just as only recently have we become aware of the cultural implications of using the word 'black' in pejorative phrases, there are countless other instances where thoughtless use of language can cause offence. George Lakoff, among others, has argued that metaphors are used by the dominant group to assert and maintain their power, and even the common metaphor of 'up' equating to 'good' as in moving up in the world, feeling down, may owe something to our cultural cosmology of heaven being above. Disparities in cosmological conceptions are at the same time the hardest differences to recognise, and the most difficult to reconcile.

In this introduction I have tried to present the outline of an approach to understanding different cultural perceptions of space. In the next section, and in future papers, I shall explore these ideas in more detail, giving examples of potential conflicts, as well as suggesting exercises and strategies for uncovering the influence and mitigating the effects of such difference.

Managing Personal Space

On a recent trip to Japan, President Barack Obama contrived simultaneously to charm his hosts and offend a sizeable number of his compatriots by both bowing and shaking hands with the Japanese Emperor. Media comment in the U.S. ranged from chauvinist rhetoric about the U.S. President not having to bow to anybody, to spurious analysis by 'experts' on whether the bow in question was of the appropriate depth or declination and whether the handshake was redundant. Further expert opinion debated the appropriateness or otherwise of touching the Emperor at all, as it did when Michelle Obama laid a hand on the Queen of England last year. In Japan, meanwhile, Obama's bow and handshake clearly delighted the Imperial couple along with the overwhelming majority of their subjects — although the smiles on Japanese faces were interpreted by some U.S. commentators as embarrassment. Interestingly, the cultural reception of this presidential gesture was almost precisely the reverse of that when, at a gathering of world leaders in St Petersburg in 2006, George W. Bush spontaneously gave Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany an unexpected and clearly unwelcome neck rub. An action that

may have been seen as a friendly overture in Crawford, Texas provoked outrage in Germany. On this occasion many U.S. viewers could not see what the fuss was about. In both of the above cases, there were clear and significant differences in interpretation as to the appropriate use of one's body in relation to those of others: the issue of personal space.

Managers, and indeed all of us, in multicultural settings have to deal with a complex range of reactions with regard to personal space and its perceived infringement, a problem exacerbated by the frequent inability on the part of the persons affected to express exactly why they are feeling uncomfortable or tense. How far away should another person stand during a conversation? How close can a third person approach without intruding? How does one interact with another who is on the telephone? Do lowered voices in a conversation signify respect for others or furtiveness? Does poking one's head around another's office door to ask a question imply politeness or trespass? Under what circumstances is it appropriate to touch another person, or to maintain eye contact? How are all these situations affected by age, status, or gender of the participants? Our answers to such questions are so deeply ingrained that they often lie beneath the level of conscious thought, appearing to us as universal common sense, or human nature. While many of these spatial perceptions, such as the sense of being crowded, are indeed rooted in evolutionary biology, and are to that extent hardwired, the immense variety of their particular expressions in different societies show them to be powerful cultural constructs, the study of which is called proxemics.

Proxemics, according to Hall, who coined the term, refers to "the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture." In this sense it is commonly listed as one of the most important culturally specific nonverbal communication codes or behaviours, along with others such as gesture, facial expression, dress, haptics (touching), olfactics (smell), and chronemics (time). Indeed, some of these other nonverbal signals are themselves dependent on proxemics; to be close enough to touch or smell another person, or to detect subtle changes of expression or posture, implies an interpersonal propinquity that is highly culturally regulated. Many U.S. Americans, Japanese, and northern Europeans can experience excruciating discomfort, if not threat, in interactions with people from cultures such as many South American ones, where tactile communication is a normal part of conversation, or with Arabs, who expect to feel and smell the other person's breath during a same-gender encounter.

Hall defined four spatial zones that people in all cultures recognise, albeit with differing ideas as to their dimensions: the intimate (lovemaking, comforting), the personal (casual conversations, friendly encounters), the social (formal conversations, business), and the public (lectures, speeches). As Stella Ting-Toomey has written, "irritations most often occur in defining what constitutes intimate space as opposed to personal space," and many writers on proxemics use the image of an invisible bubble to describe the intimate/personal zone, that area beyond the outlines of the physical body that a person nevertheless feels to be part of his or her space. Not only is this bubble culturally conditioned, it is also highly contextual, its outline expanding or contracting according to the situation. Our bubble necessarily shrinks

on the subway during rush hour, yet if someone is the only passenger on the bus and the next person to board takes the adjacent seat (a common, sociable act in the Philippines, for example), many westerners would experience a visceral sense of personal space violation. Furthermore, the personal bubble can extend to material features of the environment, where it is known as territoriality — my desk, my house, my car, my parking space. Few aspects of our lives do not exhibit a proxemic dimension, and the emotional and behavioural consequences of perceived transgressions, from mild discomfort through road rage to violent conflict, may be no less severe for being largely below the level of awareness. Ideas of appropriate personal space are of far more than merely academic interest.

So far in this article I have attempted to build on Hall's work by considering a number of conceptual frames other than the personal by which humans perceive space differently according to their cultural backgrounds. By looking once again at these frames with specific reference to personal space perception, it may be possible to illustrate the interrelated nature of the whole topic, showing not only how proxemic values derive from cultural backgrounds, but how they in turn help to form the outward manifestations of a culture. By understanding more about the complex cultural patterns that underlie what we unconsciously see or viscerally experience as 'wrong', we can perhaps enlarge our ability to empathise with and more effectively manage disputes and misunderstandings.

Residential and occupational spaces such as houses and offices demonstrate clearly the ways in which the personal bubble can expand to enclose the physical environment, size and location often equating to status or sense of self-worth — or at least the image of those qualities that the occupier wishes to project. Cars can, in this sense, be thought of as a kind of temporary residence; many people driving Hummers tend to feel they have not only the right to more space, but also to greater deference from other road users. Territoriality does seem to be a human universal, yet its expression is culturally contingent to a very high degree. For many U.S. homeowners the house is an extension of the self, its furnishings and decor reflecting the owner's personality. It is a place to entertain friends, but only within circumscribed limits; some areas are private, or access is restricted, even for other members of the household — the teenager's room, the father's workshop, the parents' bedroom. It is a notable cultural feature of such houses that specific rooms are devoted to certain activities, as opposed to the cultural pattern in which the space stays the same but the activities change, as in traditional Japanese houses or Hopi dwellings. Such differences may be connected to wider cultural values reflecting relative ambiguity and flexibility, openness and propriety; visitors to both homes and workplaces must therefore expect to encounter sometimes radically differing and consequentially significant ideas regarding personal space and its limits.

Communal space, the physical shape of the society in which a person grows up, is a major influence on the individual sense of personal boundaries. The unplanned, organic shape of older, mixed-use settlements may inculcate in its inhabitants a mindset very different to that of people brought up within the rectilinear grid of a planned residential development, especially a gated community. Also, in a small, stable village or town of contiguous dwellings there is likely to be less

privacy than in a large city with a more transient population of mutual strangers, and personal bubbles tend to be more porous in the former. On the other hand, the higher population density of the city requires that personal space be more often inadvertently invaded, and boundaries are harder to maintain, hence the common urban strategy of avoiding eye contact. Urban conditions are therefore more conducive to producing what ethologists term critical distance situations, the 'fight or flight' scenario in which personal space must either be yielded or defended. Clearly, some cultures do much better than others at resolving these situations without recourse to violence, suggesting a values system with less emphasis on individualism and personal rights. The line between public and private is much less definitively drawn in societies committed to communal or shared responsibility, a values difference that will influence all aspects of communication and behaviour.

The connections between environmental and personal space are manifold. It is often said in Japan, for instance, that U.S. Americans seem to 'take up more space' than Japanese, an observation unrelated to actual body size. Voices are louder, gestures are broader, postures are more voluminous — all of which probably stems from the U.S. sense of coming from a huge country with ample room to spread out, as opposed to the feeling of physical constraint appropriate to inhabiting a mountainous island the size of California but with five times the number of people. Other environmental factors such as landscape and climate clearly have their effects, both physical and psychological; an upbringing in a region subject to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes may engender a different attitude to risk and a higher degree of environmental awareness compared to a native of a more predictably hospitable land. Seasonal affective disorder can have debilitating effects on someone raised in sunnier climes. And on a yet smaller scale, the sensory environment can intrude on personal space by evoking strong cultural memories and associations. Few expatriate Indonesians can encounter the smell of cloves, the pervasive aroma of their homeland, without experiencing powerful nostalgia, just as Muslims, wherever they are in the world, will react physically on hearing the call to prayer, or people returning to their home town after a long absence will be affected by the first sight of a once-familiar landmark.

With regard to the geographical frame, everyone has a unique mental image of the world together with his or her place in it — typically, in the very centre. These subjective maps are formed from a range of cultural influences, including the media to which we are exposed, our education, and our necessarily limited experience of other peoples and regions, and the resulting generalisations and stereotypes need have little relationship to geographical reality to affect our actions with regard to others. We tend to interact with other people, that is, from a position of unconscious ethnocentrism, arrogating to ourselves a set of rights and beliefs that license us to act in ways that may easily be perceived as personal trespass. Although all multicultural situations fit this description, tourism provides ample and obvious evidence of such attitudes, and host cultures are increasingly attempting to sensitise visitors to local customs and expectations with regard to personal space. The Provincial Tourist Department of Luang Prabang, Laos, for instance, has produced, with the aid of UNESCO, a detailed pamphlet on approp-

riate dress, use of cameras, prohibitions against bodily contact, and concepts of privacy, and such strategies no doubt help to mitigate the most egregious transgressions. Our bodies and the ways in which we use and adorn them, however, are products of a highly specific and influential cultural geography and, outside of this familiar context, even with the best of intentions a total avoidance of offence is probably impossible. Openness to new experience, careful observation, and an obvious attitude of curiosity, respect and humility are no doubt the most helpful approaches.

Although the two terms are at opposite ends of the ostensibly linear framework I have used for this paper, cosmological space is in many respects inseparable from personal space, giving the overall pattern a circular form. Cultural ideas about the physical body and its nature inevitably reflect metaphysical beliefs, and connections between personal microcosm and universal macrocosm, while differing in particulars, are common to many cultures around the world. Systems of varying degrees of plausibility, from Chinese feng shui to western zodiacal horoscopes illustrate the widespread and enduring appeal of such beliefs. Although cosmological ideas may be unacknowledged, they can be nevertheless powerful, resulting in mutual incomprehension in many spheres of interaction, perhaps especially in the areas of health and medical communication. A telling example of the implications of such cultural misunderstanding has been well described by Anne Fadiman in her book about the Hmong understanding of epilepsy. Equally significant differences in beliefs about the body, whether it is sacred or profane, and who has ultimate control over it exist within cultures much more superficially similar, as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Scientists, and are especially salient in debates about health insurance, abortion, capital punishment, or torture. To an extent, all of these examples reflect differing core values about control and responsibility, not only with regard to one's own body, its limits, and its condition, but also those of others.

As I hope is clear from this paper, managing space in all its various forms involves a delicate balancing act between staying true to one's own fundamental principles, as well as those of the organization or culture to which one belongs, yet at the same time demonstrating respect for and willingness to engage with the very different values and perceptions of others. As with all intercultural encounters, three concepts are vital to maintaining this balance, and the manager's main concern should be to devise ways to facilitate and encourage their development. In the first place, curiosity about other cultures and their patterns is essential, and this impulse must be satisfied with accurate information, rather than loose generalizations and stereotypes. Such understanding must then inspire an informed respect for the cultural differences that will manifest themselves. In the course of this article I have suggested ways in which these three attitudes may be inspired, but individual situations render any specific prescription otiose. At the very least though, managers should try to cultivate an atmosphere in which careful, active listening is a component of open, nonthreatening dialogue among as many participants as possible. Cultural differences in space perception may be subtle, yet can result in serious conflict in situations ranging from the interpersonal to the international. Given a sufficient measure of awareness and

goodwill, however, exploration of these same differences can lead not only to an enjoyably enhanced understanding of ourselves and of the rich cultural worlds around us, but also to increased organizational efficiency and profitability.

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