

# Cross-Cultural Communication Between Finland and America

Many conflicts have their roots in misunderstandings. This happens when people do not realize that things can be expressed and understood in different ways. This is a problem in intra-cultural communication, when we interact daily with people who have the same nationality, the same language and the same culture; it is an even greater problem in cross-cultural communication, between people from different languages, speaking different languages, and having different customs and manners.

What should we be aware of if we want to improve communication between Finns and Americans?

America is a typical low-context-culture. In the typology of Edward T. Hall cultures are classified according to the amount of information that has to be explicitly coded: high-context (HC) communication is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in person, whilst very little is included in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message; a low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite, i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

In America, the information is articulated, verbalized, the things are said. Practically nothing is taken for granted. The communication flow is linear, a logical presentation is preferred, no step is omitted. The whole communication process has a value of its own and it is verbalized. In face-to-face communication a dialogue is

preferred, because every communicator is considered to be equal. The result of the discussion often depends on the arguments that are used during the discussion.

A typical high-context culture is the Japanese culture. The situational perspective predominates, who says something is of great significance, the communication is ritualized. The communication is dot-like, only the product is verbalized, not necessarily the steps leading to this thinking product. Many things are taken for granted. Because they are considered to be obvious, they can be left unsaid. Communication tends to consist of long monologues.

The Finnish Synthetic Communication

We can find characteristics of Finnish communication which strongly resemble those in Japanese society and differ from those in American society. They seem to be eastern characteristics. Like the

Japanese, the Finns do not verbalize the whole communication process, they assume that several things are obvious to the communication partner and do not need to be said.

It is mainly the product of thinking that counts, not the cause cross-cultural difficulties. An American cannot easily follow the Finnish synthetic mode of communication, he wants an analytic, logical step-by-step explanation. For a Finn, this would sound too naive, too superficial. He interprets the message and seeks the real meaning behind the words, in the background information, in the context.

In the West one relies on communication, in the East on interpretation. We can easily imagine that these different communication habits can cause problems in international politics: Expressions which are meant to be taken literally are interpreted in order to find the "real message behind the words", conversely, expressions which have several presuppositions to be considered are perhaps taken too literally.

## American Communication Is Analogous to the Headline

The difference between America and Finland on the LC/HC-scale influences the discourse form at various levels. Consider e.g. the organization and structuring of the presentation. The American communication style is analogous to the headline. They announce at the start what they are going to talk about and where the discourse will end. They tend to follow primacy and anticlimactic principles of organization.

In the eastern way, communication predominantly favours recency and climactic principles of rhetorical form, saving the most interesting series. They also give much more detailed background data than Americans are used to giving. So you may not always be able to identify the main point until reaching the end of the comments.

As an American, you must keep in mind that in communicating to HC-members you must repeat your main point at the end of your list, or may miss it. And as a Finn, you must remember to get down to the point, to put the main information first, to start a paragraph with a topic sentence, to develop it with specific details, and to conclude with a return to a general statement in the summary sentence.

## Finns Answer - But Slowly

Due to the fact that only the final product of thinking is announced by Finns, there will be many more silent pauses and slower reactions in Finnish than in American discourse. As an American, you thus have to be patient. The Finn will not have the American habit of thinking and listening aloud, but nevertheless the answer to your question will come - in most cases at least - but not as quickly as back home.

I do not know if the Fulbright professor who came to Finland in order to investigate the silent breaks in the talk of the Finns-Finns (who are famous for their taciturn nature and charmness with words) has completed his work but the results might be very interesting from the cross-cultural point of view.

The Japanese, as a typical HC-culture, have developed "aesthetics of silence" in place of rhetoric and logic. They tend to view silence as essential to self-realization and sublimation. This is diametrically opposed to the American way



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of looking at silence as symptomatic of a problem. In America, as a LC-culture, greater cultural diversity and heterogeneity are likely to make verbal skills more necessary and, therefore, more highly prized. One of the chief qualifications of a group leader indeed is his or her mastery of verbal expression.

On the other hand, a Finn should learn to display his or her thinking process in order to avoid misunderstandings from the American side. "Just a moment, I have to think about it", would clarify the silence of a Finn who needs time for his or her answer to a question of an American communication partner.

The slower reaction, i.e. the attitude to time, also influences the discourse form of dialogue versus monologue. The reaction time left by an American for a Finn is often too short, the Finn does not recognize it as meant for him or her. So he or she fails to react, whilst the American thinks he or she had nothing to say. On the other hand, a Finn is more used to speaking in monologues, his monologue consists mainly of statements,

## Doing Is the Dominant Activity to Americans

Going further towards minor entities of the discourse, we can see a similar difference as is found in American/Japanese communication. Røisei Okabe, who has compared the cultural assumptions of East and West (i.e. Japan and the United States) distinguishes, on the basis of several investigations, between the "doing" (American) and the "being" (Japanese) orientations. Such American expressions as "getting things done", "How are you doing?", "I'm doing fine. How are you coming along?", all indicate that "doing" is the dominant activity for Americans.

In Japan an individual's birth, family background, age, and rank tend to be more important than his or her factual achievements and development. The Japanese think of things happening or being of themselves. Even things that have been decided upon are thought of as having happened. Asked what they have been doing, Japanese are likely to answer "I did such and such", but "Things happen to be so and so".

A Finn is likely to react in a similar way, although this is perhaps not so probable as in Japanese, because the structure of the Japanese language and Japanese society are different. But in any case, there

will become kind of modesty which prevents the emphasizing of the personal and individual role.

"Olm'n tässä kylläkin on... instead of 'Olm'olinnin kyssä' would be the most natural oral expression a Finn uses thus removing the personal responsibility. My wife who, although she is a Finn, has the western analytic and linear mode of thinking and communicating - sometimes criticizes me for using expressions like 'The vase broke' or 'The cup happened to break'. She means that these expressions imply no personal responsibility for what happened. Perhaps so, but these are also examples of the 'Eastern' way of stating how things happened. I understand that I broke the vase and do not want to deny it. I only want to be modest and state the result not the process. Being aware of these differences helps one to judge properly many political and social phenomena. Okabe names as an example the attitude toward peace. For those who have been reared in

American advertising and promotion are, in many cases, too strong for a Finn. In contrast, the modest Finnish expression might sound unconvincing to an American.

Last but not least, I want to speak about the public and private nature of communication. Because they are presumed to be equal and symmetrical in their relationships, the Americans tend to maximize their 'public self', that is, to expose more of themselves than the Japanese, who are apt to maximize their 'private self' in interaction with others. As a result, Americans are likely to express their inner feelings and emotions openly, whilst Japanese tend to conceal them in an effort to maintain harmonious relations with people around them.

I am not sure if this also holds true for Finns, but in any case Finns are not used to expressing their inner feelings and emotions. This is especially true for Finnish men, since a Finnish man neither speaks nor kisses. It will therefore be a very difficult matter for a

Finn to express verbally his attachment to another, whereas an American is used to saying and hearing the phrase 'I love you' ad infinitum. So, an American who does not hear the phrase might think he or she is not liked at all, whereas a Finn who hears the phrase often tends to think it is an empty statement.

In situations like this, as well as in all cross-cultural situations, a great deal of empathy and mutual cooperation is needed for successful communication. It is not an easy task. No one can master cross-cultural communication perfectly. Still, I am convinced that efforts in this direction will always be rewarded. It is not only a question of particular communication situation, a happy end to business negotiations etc., but also of international understanding as a whole. In Finnish-American connections and close relations we have an excellent basis to practice an increasing, better international and cross-cultural understanding.

### American Overstatement Versus Finnish Understatement

Another difference among minor entities is the difference between the American overstatement and Finnish understatement. Such categorical words as "absolutely", "certainly" and "positively" as well as the frequent use of the superlative particularly in

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Yhdysvaltain ja Suomen välisen kaupan ja investointien lisääntymisen viime vuosina on lisännyt myös Yhdysvalloissa työnsä takia vieraillevien suomalaisten määrää. Yhdysvaltain Suomen suurlähetystön konsulaatio-osasto myönsi vuoden 1987 ensimäisellä puoliskolla 21 765 viisumia, mikä merkitsee 22 prosentin nousua viime vuodesta.

USA:n siirtolaislakiin sisältyy 14 erilaista vierailuvissumityyppiä (A-N), joista yhdeksän koskee liike- ja työmatkoja. Viisumityyppi riippuu yleensä matkan tarkoituksesta ja vierailijan työantajasta. Joissakin tapauksissa vierailijan koulutusohjalla ja työpaikoilla samoin kuin työnantajain USA:n kanssa harjoittamalla liikeruokkimalla on merkitystä viisumityyppiä määrättäessä. Jotkut viisumit konsulaatti voi myöntää suoraan, mutta toisiin tarvitaan ensin Yhdysvaltain siirtolaisviraston (Immigration and Naturalization Service/INS) hyväksyntä.

### Yleisin liikematkavissumit sallii vain neuvottelut

Yleisin liikematkavissumit on B-1-vissumi. Siihen ei tarvita INS:n hyväksyntää. Se myönnetään lyhyttä, tietynä aikana tapahtuvaa Yhdysvaltain vierailua varten, joka liittyy neuvotteluihin, konsulaatioihin, kokouksiin, konferensseihin tai suomalaisten tuotteiden myynninedistämiseen ja niin edelleen. Edellä mainitun kaltaista poikkeava työskentely Yhdysvaltain vierailun aikana edellyttää yleensä muunlaista kuin B-1-vierailuvissumia. Tällaisissa tapauksissa amerikkalainen työnantaja tai edustaja on ensin velvollinen hankkimaan vierailijalle luvan INS:stä ennen kuin konsulaatti voi myöntää asianmukaisen viisumin.

Tähän sääntöön on kuitenkin erillaisia poikkeuksia, joista mainittakoon seuraavat. Ensimmäkin "erityisen arvostettu ja kyykyks" vierailija (ei vuitenkään viihdetaitelija), jonka vierailun tarkoituksena on tällaista arvostusta ja kykyä käyttä vaitava tehtävä ja joka ei saa palkkaa tai muuta korvausta amerikkalaiselta talolta (satunnaista matkakaus-

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CUSTOMS DECLARATION

Each article or package of goods of family must provide the following information (only after declaration per family is required)

1. Name	2. Number of family members traveling with you
3. Date of Birth	4. Airfare/Flight
5. U.S. Address	
6. I am a U.S. Citizen	
Country in the U.S.	
7. Residence Length of Stay	
8. The purpose of my trip is or was	
<input type="checkbox"/> BUSINESS	<input type="checkbox"/> PLEASURE
9. I am carrying fruits, plants, animals, food, etc. which have been on a farm or ranch outside the U.S.	
10. I am carrying currency, or negotiable instruments	

Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_

# Oikea viisumi helpottaa liikematkaksi

Mahdollisimman helppo ja laimmukainen liikematkka edellyttää, että vierailijalla on oikeantyyppinen viisumi. Seuraavassa esitellään liikematkavissumit pääpiirteittäin ja joitakin niihin liittyviä yleisiä määräyksiä.

min yhteydessä myönnetään B-2-turistivissumi, joka on voimassa toistaiseksi eikä aseteta rajoituksia maahan-tuloerolle. Viisumi on siis voimassa liike- ja turistimatkoja varten kunnes Yhdysvaltain konsuli tai INS sen peruuttaa. Viisumi on voimassa myös passin vanhentumisen jälkeen. Vierailijan on kuitenkin esitettävä vanhentunut passi, jossa viisumi on sekä voimassa oleva se anoa uutta viisumia, mikäli vierailijan vanha passissa on B-1-vissumi ja vierailun tarkoitus on muuttunut, vierailijan on syytä ottaa yhteyttä konsulaattiin, joka selvittää tarvittaanko toisenlaisen viisumin.

Toinen viisumityyppi, E-1-vissumi, jonka konsulaatti voi antaa ilman INS:n hyväksyntää, perustuu Yhdysvaltain ja Suomen väliseen konsulaatioita koskevaan sopimukseen (Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Consular Rights). Yhdysvaltain vierailua suunnitteleva Suomen kansalainen, joka itsenäisesti arvioi

tannuksia lukuunottamatta) voi hakea B-1-vissumia. Tällainen vierailija olisi esimerkiksi Yhdysvaltain Bachelor of Art tai Bachelor of Science -tutkintoa (humanististen tieteiden kandidaatti, filosofian kandidaatti) vastaavan turkin- tai INS sen peruuttaa. Viisumi on suorittanut ammatillisesti pätevä henkilö.

Toiseksi ammatityöntekijä, lukuunottamatta rakennustyöläisiä, joka haluaa väliaikaisesti vierailulla Yhdysvalloissa tarkoituksenaan asentaa tai huoltaa teollisuuslaitteistoja, jotka koostuvat osittain muualta kuin Yhdysvalloista, tai opastaa amerikkalaisia työläisiä, voi hakea B-1-vissumia edellyttäen, että viisumiohjelmassa erityisesti edellytetään myyjän tarjoavan tällaista palvelua. 2) Kyseisellä työntekijällä on vaitava ammatittaito, 3) hän ei saa palkkaa amerikkalaiselta yrityksestä ja että 4) matka tapahtuu kauppaan seuraavan vuoden sisällä.

Yleensä B-1-liikematkavissumit

stiviisumit voimassa pysyvästi

**HONDA** Suomalainen tulevaisuus.

Uusi lukkiutumaton ALB-jarrujärjestelmä (valinnaisvaruste) lisää turvallisuutta tietokoneen varmuudella kaikissa nopeuksissa ja keliolosuhteissa.

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Maailman ensimmäinen sarjavalmistetun nelipyöräohjauksella 4WS ohjaa Preluden suoraan autollun uuteen alkakäyttöön. Preludessa on urheilullauton luonne: 16 venttiiliä, elektroninen PGM-FI-suihkutus, 150 hv, 0-100 km/h 8,0 sek., huippunopeus 209 km/h.

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