

## 6

### FEELINGS AND RELATIONSHIPS

In relationships between people, reason and emotion both play a role. Which of these dominates will depend upon whether we are **affective**, that is we show our emotions, in which case we probably get an emotional response in return, or whether we are emotionally **neutral** in our approach.

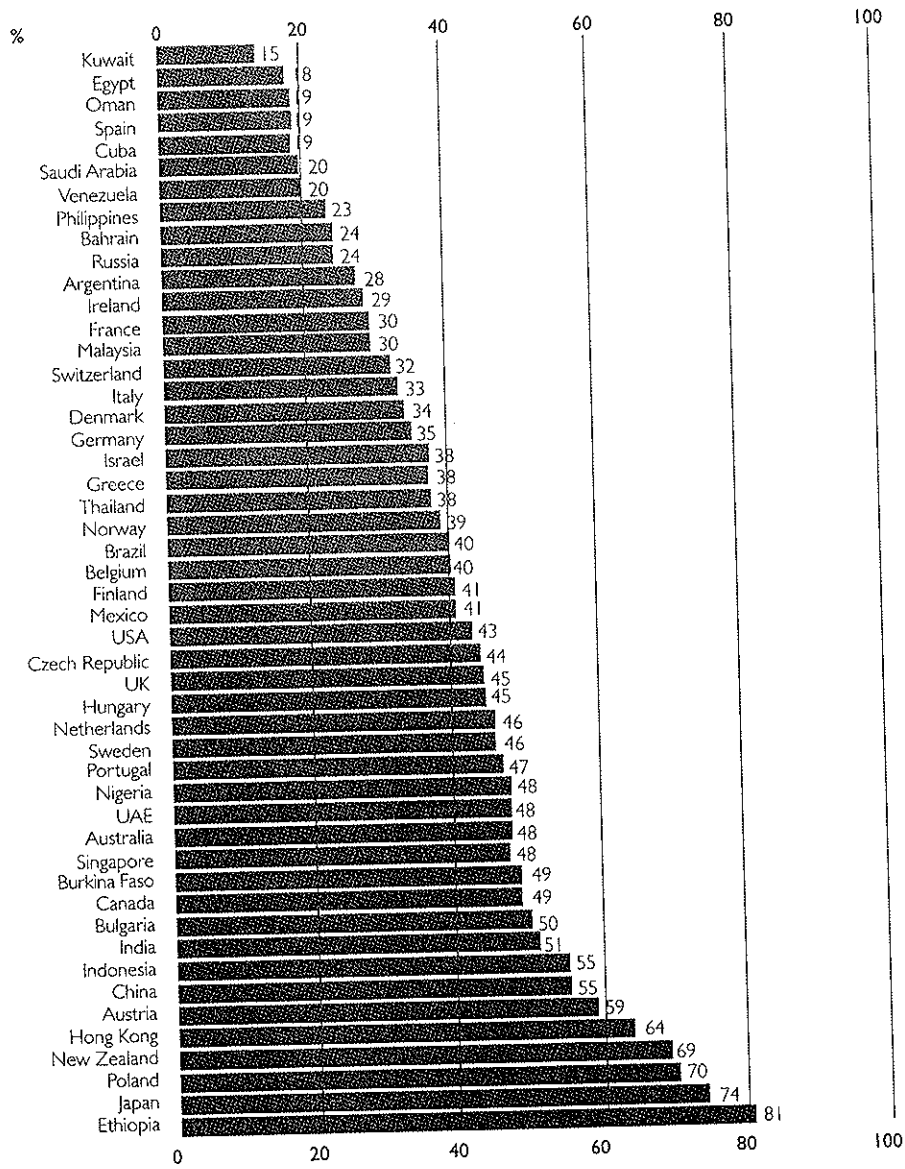
#### **Affective versus neutral cultures**

Members of cultures which are affectively neutral do not telegraph their feelings but keep them carefully controlled and subdued. In contrast, in cultures high in affectivity people show their feelings plainly by laughing, smiling, grimacing, scowling and gesturing; they attempt to find immediate outlets for their feelings. We should be careful not to over-interpret such differences. Neutral cultures are not necessarily cold or unfeeling, nor are they emotionally constipated or repressed. The amount of emotion we show is often the result of convention. In a culture in which feelings are controlled, irrepressible joy or grief will still signal loudly. In a culture where feelings are amplified, they will have to be signalled more loudly still in order to register at all. In cultures where everyone emotes, we may not find words or expressions adequate for our strongest feelings, since they have all been used up.

A workshop exercise under this heading asks participants how they would behave if they felt upset about something at work. Would they express their feelings openly? Figure 6.1 shows the relative positions of ten countries on the extent to which exhibiting emotion is acceptable. It is least acceptable in Ethiopia and Japan, where our database shows a score of close to 80% on the neutral orientation. There are considerable variances between European countries, with Austria the most neutral (59%) and Spain, Italy and France the least (19%, 33% and 30%). Note that Hong Kong and Singapore both score much lower than Japan or Indonesia; there is no general pattern by continent.

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Figure 6.1 **Feeling upset at work.**  
Percentage of respondents who would not show emotions openly



Typically, reason and emotion are of course combined. In expressing ourselves we try to find confirmation of our thoughts and feelings in the response of our audience. When our own approach is highly emotional we are seeking a **direct** emotional response: "I have the same feelings as you on this subject." When our own approach is highly neutral we are seeking an **indirect** response: "Because I agree with your reasoning or proposition, I give you my support." On both occasions approval is being sought, but different paths are being used to this end. The indirect path gives us emotional support contingent upon the success of an effort of intellect. The direct path allows our feelings about a factual proposition to show through, thereby "joining" feelings with thoughts in a different way.

Consider a scene in which the Italian office of MCC has made a proposal to allow the sales personnel to decide as a group whether they wish to have individual incentives or to share bonus payments among the whole team, while identifying the persons responsible for winning the bonus. You will recall that this was the idea Mr. Bergman, the Dutch representative, called "crazy" in Chapter 5.

Raising his voice, Mr. Pauli, Gialli's colleague, asked: "What do you mean, a crazy idea? We have carefully considered the pros and cons, and consider that it would greatly benefit the buyer."

"Please, don't get over-excited," pleaded Mr. Johnson. "We need to provide solid arguments and should not get side-tracked by emotional irrelevancies."

Before Bergman had a chance to explain why he thought it was a crazy idea, the two Italian colleagues left the room for a time-out. "This is what I call a typical Italian reaction," Mr. Bergman remarked to his colleagues. "Before I even had a chance to give my arguments as to why I think the idea is crazy, they walk out."

The other managers were squirming uncomfortably in their chairs. They did not know what to think. Mr. Johnson got up and left the room to talk to the Italians.

It is easy for British, North Americans or northwest Europeans to sympathize with Johnson or Bergman about "excitable" Italians. After all, the incentive system either works or it does not. This will not change however strongly we feel. It is a matter of trial and observation. According to this approach neutrality is a means to an end. The time to get emotional is when the incentives work or fail to work, at which point pleasure or disappointment are appropriate. After all, control of our feelings is a sign of civilization, is it not?

Such explanations show that we can adduce good reasons for any cultural norm. The Italians were angry because they identified emotionally with their sales team and knew intuitively that working hard for each other as well as for customers was the motivation of an excellent sales person. They felt as they knew their sales force would feel about the emotional rewards for hard work. Mr Bergman's "reasonable judgment" was not relevant to Italians. Since when is the intrinsic pleasure found in work a matter of "fact" anyway? It is deeply personal and cultural. As Pascal wrote: "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of." But he was a Frenchman.

And what about the verdict of the Prime Court in Italy in late 1996, which indicates that husbands are allowed to beat their spouses if they are in a passionate mood and as long as it is done infrequently. The Italian judge did find compelling evidence that the husband had hit his wife so hard that she had to be hospitalized, and there was no "systematic and conscious brutality." The victim, Anna Mannino, was very pleased with the final verdict since she found her partner a "model husband." She had never accused him. The hospital did!

### Degrees of affectivity in different cultures

The amount of visible "emoting" is a major difference between cultures. We may think that a Frenchman who curses us in a traffic accident is truly enraged, close to committing violence. In fact, he may simply be getting his view of the facts in first and may expect an equal stream of vituperation from us in return. He may, indeed, be further from violence as a result of this expression. There are norms about acceptable levels of vehemence and these can be much higher in some countries than in others.

Americans, for example, tend to be on the expressive side. Perhaps this is because with so many immigrants and such a large country they have had to break down social barriers again and again. The habit of using diminutives ("Chuck" instead of Charles, "Bob" instead of Robert), "smile" buttons, welcome wagons and the speed with which cordial and informal relationships are made, all testify to the need to resocialize in new neighborhoods several times in a lifetime.

This is a very different experience from life in smaller countries like Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and so on. There it may be harder to avoid than to meet those of your generation with whom you grew up. Friendships tend to start early in life and last many years, so the need to be effusive with relative strangers is much less.

There is a tendency for those with norms of emotional neutrality to dismiss anger, delight or intensity in the workplace as "unprofessional."

Mr. Pauli at MCC has obviously "lost his cool," a judgment which assumes the desirability of a cool exterior to begin with. In fact, Pauli probably regards Bergman as emotionally dead, or as hiding his true feelings behind a mask of deceit. As we shall see in Chapter 7 when we go on to discuss how specific, as opposed to diffuse, emotions can be, there are really two issues wrapped up in the question of emotional display. Should emotion be **exhibited** in business relations? Should it be **separated** from reasoning processes lest it corrupt them?

Americans tend to exhibit **emotion, yet separate** it from "objective" and "rational" decisions. Italians and south European nations in general tend to **exhibit and not separate**. Dutch and Swedes tend **not to exhibit and to separate**. Once again, there is nothing "good" or "bad" about these differences. You can argue that emotions held in check will twist your judgments despite all efforts to be "rational." Or you can argue that pouring forth emotions makes it harder for anyone present to think straight. Similarly you can scoff at the "walls" separating reasons from emotions, or argue that because of the leakage that so often occurs, these should be thicker and stronger.

North Europeans watching a south European politician on television disapprove of waving hands and other gestures. So do the Japanese, whose saying "Only a dead fish has an open mouth" compares with the English "Empty vessels make the most noise."

#### **Beware humor, understatement or irony**

Cultures also vary on the permissible use of humor. In Britain or the USA we often start our workshops with a cartoon or anecdote which makes a joke about the main points to be covered. This is always a success. Hence one of the first workshops in Germany was launched, with some confidence, with a cartoon deriding European cultural differences. Nobody laughed; indeed, the audience was taking notes and looked puzzled. As the week went by, however, there was a lot of laughter in the bar, and eventually even in the sessions. It was simply that it was not permissible in a professional setting, between strangers.

The British use humor a lot to release emotions dammed up behind the "stiff upper lip." They also regard understatement as funny. If a Briton speaks of being "underwhelmed" by someone's presentation, or regarding it with "modified rapture," that is a way of **controlling** emotional expression, while at the same time triggering emotional release in the form of laughter. The individual thereby has it both ways. A Japanese superior will similarly rebuke an incompetent subordinate by exaggerated deference: "If you could see your way to kindly troubling

yourself in a matter so minor, I would be in your debt." In affective language, this translates as "Do it or else."

Unfortunately, understatements of this kind, along with throwaway lines and jokes, are almost always lost on foreigners even if they speak the language well enough for normal discourse. Humor is language-dependent and relies on a very quick sense of the meaning of words. "She was a good cook, as cooks go, and as cooks go she went." This is funny only if you are familiar with the colloquialism "as (something) goes," meaning "compared with other (somethings)," in which case "went" takes you by surprise. Not only is it hard for foreigners to release emotion in this way, but they are unlikely to grasp that understatements are actually intended ironically. They are more likely to see the English or Japanese as being opaque, as usual. Any statement which means the opposite to what it literally states may be hard on foreign managers and should be avoided. If insiders all laugh, the foreigner feels excluded, deprived of the emotional release the rest have enjoyed.

### **Intercultural communication**

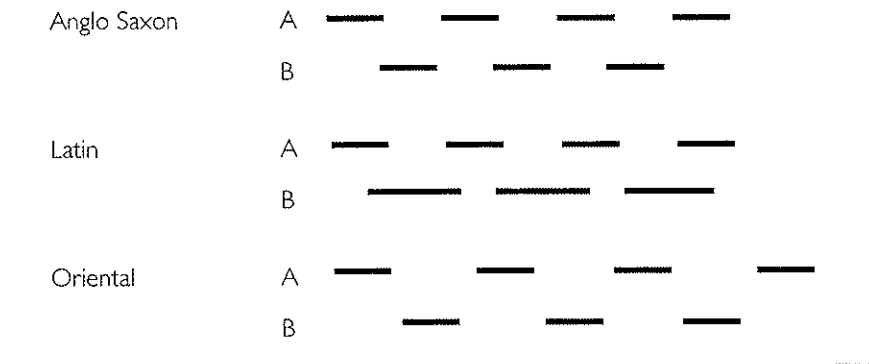
There are a variety of problems of communication across cultural boundaries which arise from the differences between affective and neutral approaches. In our workshops we frequently ask the participants to describe the concept of intercultural communication. They list instruments—language, body language—and more general definitions like the exchange of messages and ideas. Communication is of course essentially the **exchange of information**, be it words, ideas or emotions. Information, in turn, is the **carrier of meaning**. Communication is possible only between people who to some extent share a system of meaning, so here we return to our basic definition of culture.

### **Verbal communication**

Western society has a predominantly verbal culture. We communicate with paper, film and conversation. Two of the best-selling computer programmes in the Western world, wordprocessing and graphics, have been developed to support verbal communication. We become nervous and uneasy once we stop talking. But we have very different styles of discussion. For the Anglo-Saxons, when A stops, B starts. It is not polite to interrupt. The even more verbal Latins integrate slightly more than this; B will frequently interrupt A and vice versa to show how interested each is in what the other is saying.

The pattern of silent communication shown in Figure 6.2 for oriental languages frightens the Westerner. The moment of silence is interpreted

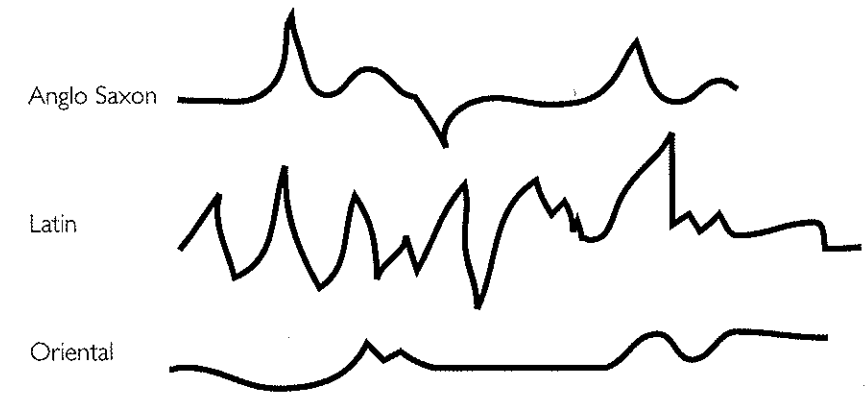
Figure 6.2 **Styles of verbal communication**



as a failure to communicate. But this is a misunderstanding. Let us reverse the roles; how can the Westerner communicate clearly if the other person is not given time to finish his or her sentence, or to digest what the other has been saying? It is a sign of respect for the other person if you take time to process the information without talking yourself.

**Tone of voice.** Another cross-cultural problem arises from tone of voice. Figure 6.3 shows typical patterns for Anglo-Saxon, Latin and oriental languages. For some neutral societies, ups and downs in speech suggest that the speaker is not serious. But in most Latin societies this "exaggerated" way of communicating shows that you have your heart in the matter. Oriental societies tend to have a much more monotonous style;

Figure 6.3 **Tone of voice**



self-controlled, it shows respect. Frequently, the higher the position a person holds, the lower and flatter their voice.

A British manager posted to Nigeria found that it was very effective to raise his voice for important issues. His Nigerian subordinates saw this unexpected explosion by a normally self-controlled manager as a sign of extra concern. After success in Nigeria he was posted to Malaysia. Shouting there was a sign of loss of face; his colleagues did not take him seriously and he was transferred.

**The spoken word.** The most obvious verbal process is the spoken word. Regardless of rhythm, pace or humor, this needs to be taken into consideration. English-speaking nations have the enormous advantage of more than 300m speakers who understand their language. However, as we all know, even the English and Americans are "separated" by a common language which is used quite differently in different contexts and which has some serious differences in the meanings of individual words. English speakers also face an enormous disadvantage, which is that it is very difficult to ever speak another language; its nationals will allow you only so much accent before switching to English themselves. To express yourself in another language is a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for understanding another culture.

#### **Non-verbal communication**

Research has shown that at least 75% of all communication is non-verbal. This figure is the minimum for the most verbal cultures of all. In western societies **eye contact** is crucial to confirm interest. However, the amount differs sharply from society to society. An Italian visiting professor at Wharton arrived on campus and was surprised to be greeted by a number of students. His expressive Italian nature drove him eventually to catch one of them and ask him if he knew who he was. The student said he was afraid he did not. "So why did you greet me?" "Because it seemed like you knew me, sir." The professor realized that in the USA eye contact between strangers is supposed to last only for a split second.

Leonel Brug, a colleague at the Trompenaars Hampden-Turner Group, was brought up in both Curaçao and Surinam. As a boy he would try to avoid eye contact, whereupon his Curaçao grandmother would slap him in the face (in some cultures body talk is very effective) and say, "Look me in the face." Respecting an elder involves eye contact. Leonel learned fast, and when in Surinam looked his other grandmother straight in the face to show respect. She slapped him too; respectful kids in Surinam do not make eye contact.



Touching other people, the space it is normal to keep between you, and assumptions about **privacy** are all further manifestations of affective or neutral cultures. Never help an Arab lady out of a bus; it might cost you your contract.

### **Reconciling neutral and affective cultures**

Overly neutral or affective (expressive) cultures have problems doing business with each other. The neutral person is easily accused of being ice-cold with no heart; the affective person is seen as out of control and inconsistent. When such cultures meet the first essential is to recognize the differences, and to refrain from making any judgments based on emotions or the lack of them.

The power of reconciliation can be shown if we see what happens when seemingly opposing values are disconnected. Emotions that are expressed without any "neutral" brake easily verge on the uncontrolled "neurotic." An overly neutral person may become an iceman who dies of a heart attack because of unexpressed emotions.

The traditional wooden rollercoaster ride has been a major attraction of amusement parks for nearly 100 years. In the last decade promoters have tried to give even greater thrills with "white knuckle rides." The engineering of such rides requires the design engineer to provide a series of accelerations and twists to excite with just enough respite to recover before the next thrill. Western joyriders scream and wave their arms to participate in the spirit of the experience.

Supported by modern electronics and safety features, this is now big business and specialist manufacturers from the USA and Europe have sought to export their offerings. One Californian company installed several of its rides in Japan. In spite of a well-proven design, Japanese riders continued to receive head injuries. Observation revealed that the Japanese riders were more likely to keep their heads low or forward in a semi-bowed posture, thereby striking their heads on the bar designed to hold them in place, rather than taking a more upright, arm-waving position. Expensive modifications were required that prevented head injuries—to the point where safety legislation in Japan requires design solutions to take regard of their relative neutrality. Their neutrality did not, of course, mean that they were not experiencing the thrill! It is just that they were trying to control it by lowering their heads.

### **Test yourself**

Consider the following question:

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In a meeting you feel very insulted because your business counterpart tells you that your proposal is insane. What is your response?

- 1** I will not show that this person has hurt/insulted me, because that would be seen as a sign of weakness and would make me more vulnerable in the future.
- 2** I will not show that I am hurt because that would spoil our relationship. This will allow me later to tell the counterpart how much I was hurt by his or her comment so he or she might learn from it. I rather show my emotions when the counterpart has more chance to improve our business relationship.
- 3** I will show clearly that I am insulted so that my counterpart gets the message. I believe the clarity of my message will allow me to be able to control even greater emotional upset in the future.
- 4** I will show clearly that I am insulted so that my counterpart gets the message. If business partners cannot behave themselves properly they have to bear the consequences.

Indicate with "1" the approach you prefer and with "2" your second choice. Similarly, indicate with "1" the approach you believe would be favored by your closest colleagues at work, and "2" the approach you believe would be his or her second choice.

Obviously, answer "1" indicates that you prefer to be neutral and reject affectivity in response. Answer "4" clearly reflects a preference for emotional outbursts regardless of their consequences for the relationship. Answer "2" supports the neutral point of departure in order to show emotions more effectively in the future. Answer "3" takes an expressive point of departure in order to stabilize future emotional interactions.

**Practical tips for doing business in neutral and affective cultures**

**Recognizing the differences**

Neutral	Affective
1 Do not reveal what they are thinking or feeling.	1 Reveal thoughts and feelings verbally and non-verbally.
2 May (accidentally) reveal tension in face and posture.	2 Transparency and expressiveness release tensions.
3 Emotions often dammed up will occasionally explode.	3 Emotions flow easily, effusively, vehemently and without inhibition.
4 Cool and self-possessed conduct is admired.	4 Heated, vital, animated expressions admired.
5 Physical contact, gesturing or strong facial expressions often taboo.	5 Touching, gesturing and strong facial expressions common.
6 Statements often read out in monotone.	6 Statements declaimed fluently and dramatically.

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**Tips for doing business with:**

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Neutrals (for affectives)

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- 1 Ask for time-outs from meetings and negotiations where you can patch each other up and rest between games of poker with the "impassive ones."
- 2 Put as much as you can on paper beforehand.
- 3 Their lack of emotional tone does not mean that they are disinterested or bored, only that they do not like to show their hand.
- 4 The entire negotiation is typically focused on the object or proposition being discussed, not so much on you as persons.

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Affectives (for neutrals)

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- 1 Do not be put off your stride when they create scenes and get histrionic; take time-outs for sober reflection and hard assessments.
- 2 When they are expressing goodwill, respond warmly.
- 3 Their enthusiasm, readiness to agree or vehement disagreement does not mean that they have made up their minds.
- 4 The entire negotiation is typically focused on you as persons, not so much on the object or proposition being discussed.

When managing and being managed

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Neutrals

- 1 Avoid warm, expressive or enthusiastic behaviors. These are interpreted as lack of control over your feelings and inconsistent with high status.
- 2 If you prepare extensively beforehand, you will find it easier to "stick to the point," that is, the neutral topics being discussed.
- 3 Look for small cues that the person is pleased or angry and amplify their importance.

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Affectives

- 1 Avoid detached, ambiguous and cool demeanor. This will be interpreted as negative evaluation, as disdain, dislike and social distance. You are excluding them from "the family."
- 2 If you discover whose work, energy and enthusiasm has been invested in which projects, you are most likely to appreciate tenacious positions.
- 3 Tolerate great "surfeits" of emotionality without getting intimidated or coerced and moderate their importance.