

## Cultural Diversity in People's Understanding and Uses of Time

Richard W. Brislin\* and Eugene S. Kim

*University of Hawaii at Manoa, Hawaii*

La mondialisation et les projets commerciaux internationaux mettent fréquemment en relation des personnes relevant de cultures différentes. Hall soutient que la gestion du temps est un 'langage silencieux' qui affecte les conduites quotidiennes. Les auteurs ont retenu dix concepts résumant l'impact de la culture sur les contact interculturels qui sont l'un des aspects des négociations dans les affaires internationales: 1. Le temps de l'horloge et celui de l'événement: respecte-t-on des programmes préétablis ou laisse-t-on l'événement suivre son cours naturel avant de passer à un autre événement? 2. La ponctualité: quel est le degré de sensibilité au non respect des horaires convenus? 3. La relation entre la tâche et le temps social pendant la journée de travail; 4. Se consacre-t-on à une seule activité à la fois ou à plusieurs en même temps? 5. Efficience vs efficacité; 6. Un rythme de vie lent ou accéléré; 7. Comment réagit-on aux longues périodes de silence? 8. Est-on plutôt tourné vers le passé, le présent ou l'avenir? 9. La dimension symbolique due temps; 10. L'importance respective du temps consacré au travail et aux loisirs. En s'appuyant sur ces dix concepts, les auteurs suggèrent quelques idées aux hommes d'affaires qui voyagent beaucoup dans des environnements culturels différents du leur et qui acceptent des séjours de longue durée dans l'autres pays.

The global economy and international business ventures have brought many occasions for the development of interpersonal relationships among people who were socialised into different cultures. People's use of time, according to Hall, is a "silent language" that affects their everyday behaviors. The authors identify ten concepts that summarise how culture affects intercultural interactions that are part of international business dealings: 1. Clock and event time: Do people follow set schedules or let the event take its natural course before moving to another event? 2. Punctuality: How sensitive are people to deviations from appointed times? 3. The relation between task and social time during the workday; 4. Whether people do one activity at a time or do many at once; 5. Efficiency vs. effectiveness; 6. Fast and slow paces of life; 7. How people deal with long periods of silence; 8. People's time orientation: past, present and the future; 9. The symbolic meaning of time; 10. Cultural differences in importance

---

\* Address for correspondence: Richard W. Brislin, Department of Management and Industrial Relations, University of Hawaii at Manoa, College of Business Administration, 2404 Maile Way, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. Email: [brislinr@cba.hawaii.edu](mailto:brislinr@cba.hawaii.edu)

of work and leisure time. The authors also provide insights based on these ten concepts for business people who travel extensively to other cultures and who accept long-term assignments in other countries.

## INTRODUCTION

Successful long-term international business ventures require the establishment of strong interpersonal relationships among people who were socialised into different cultures. In turn, the development of these relationships is dependent on understanding cultural similarities and differences that can have powerful effects on how people communicate with each other, make joint decisions, and follow through on agreements (Adler, 1997; Osland & Bird, 2000). When international business people are asked about their experiences when living in other countries, various aspects of how time is handled are very often discussed.

Meetings were scheduled at a certain time but I was the only one there. I misread the preferences of other decision makers at a meeting and mistimed my suggestions. I couldn't figure out why people seemed to be spending so much time socializing in the workplace and ignoring tasks that clearly needed attention. (common sojourner complaints analysed by Cushner & Brislin, 1996)

We will argue that much cross-cultural research has been done on how people use time that can be applied in programs that prepare people for international assignments. When people (sojourners) are asked about important experiences in other cultures, time issues are very frequently mentioned. This means that time can be a good entry point into people's thinking about their cross-cultural preparation.

One of the first books that dealt with how people from one culture can learn to understand people from another dealt with time, which Edward Hall (1959) called *The Silent Language*. Since this influential book, various researchers and experienced international business people have written about how people in various cultures perceive, experience, and work with concepts related to time. The research and commentary allows us to provide ten general pieces of advice to business people who travel extensively to other cultures and who accept long-term assignments in other countries. For convenience, we will refer to people who move extensively among cultures as "sojourners". There is always a danger in developing a list of issues that deal with cultural differences because there will always be individual exceptions.

We feel that our list provides a good starting point for understanding cultural approaches involving time, but that the list needs to be modified as sojourners gain extensive intercultural experiences and learn to recognise exceptions to the generalisations. Our list consists of two major clusters and

within each cluster there are five related issues. The first cluster consists of issues relating to how people differ in their attitudes toward flexibility of time. The issues in the second cluster deal with people's different attitudes toward the pace of time.

### WHAT COMES FIRST? DO PEOPLE CONTROL TIME OR DOES TIME CONTROL PEOPLE?

The most significant issue from the first cluster of five concepts may be the distinction between clock and event time. A time schedule symbolised as "clock" represents official, formal, and task-oriented temporal concerns. This contrasts with event time, which gives attention to interpersonal relationships among people. The remaining four concepts within the first cluster are highly related to this clock versus event time distinction.

#### 1. Clock and Event Time

International business people, as a first step, should determine whether the clock directs behavior or whether behavior is determined by the natural course of events in which people find themselves. If people in a culture behave according to clock time, this means that they are careful about the times of scheduled appointments, make sure that their watches are running on time, and become irritated if others are careless about scheduled meetings. If people in a culture behave according to event time, then they organise their days around various events and participate in one event until it reaches its natural end and then begin another event (Levine, 1997). Again emphasising that people will encounter exceptions, clock time is found in North America, Western Europe, East Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Event time is often found in South America, South Asia (Singapore may be an exception), and countries with developing economies where the necessity of attention to clock time (e.g. stock market openings and closings) is not yet fully part of people's work habits (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999).

The distinction between clock and event time can be captured in an examination of a workplace dilemma. A well-respected business person from another country, who brings the promise of a profitable joint venture, has a 1:30 p.m. appointment with a company executive. Just before 1:30 p.m., a department head in the company stops by the executive's office with pictures of her daughter's new baby. Who has claims on the executive time, the visiting business person or the department head? In a clock time culture, the answer is clear: the visiting business person with the appointment has priority. Given that the department head understands the norms of clock time, she will not be upset if the executive calls attention to his appointment and promises to stop to look at the pictures as soon as possible. In an event

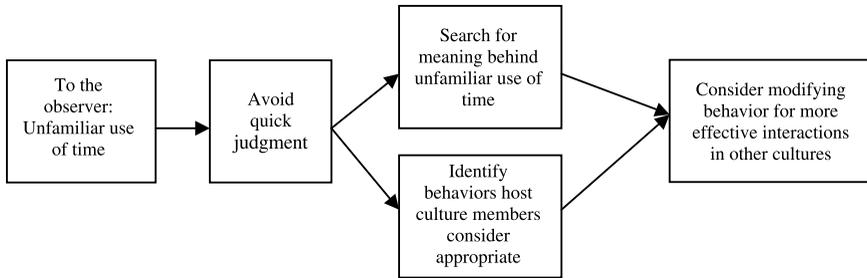


FIGURE 1. Understanding cross-cultural differences in use of time.

time culture, the department head has priority. A first time showing of baby pictures is an event! Events take time to run their course. The executive has to look at the pictures, talk about how good looking the baby is, discuss how proud the grandmother must be, call the mother on the phone to see how she and the baby are doing. Once this event ends, another event can start. The executive can then give attention to the 1:30 p.m. appointment.

What should the visitor do? He should start another event. He might ask to look at the pictures and also admire them. If the executive leaves the office to call the mother, the visitor can discuss the joint venture with others who may later be involved. Or, the visitor can ask the executive's secretary for any relevant documents that he might read until the actual meeting starts. The key point is that the visitor should enter the flow of events and not sit in a chair with a frown on his face. Our recommendation for how sojourners should think about their intercultural experiences is summarised in Figure 1.

At times, decision makers know about clock and event time and make recommendations reflecting awareness of the distinction. In some competitive sports, there is great emphasis on time and the fastest athlete wins. Swimming is an example. Some swim coaches from event time cultures will send their best athletes to the United States where people talk about time constantly and coaches (and parents, for preteen and teenage swimmers) wear expensive watches around their necks. The goal of these recommended sojourns is to instill an appreciation of clock time, the basis for determining the winners of swim meets. An emphasis on clock time has other important implications. It allows coaches who believe in positive reinforcement to offer encouraging words. A 100-yard race has four splits (laps of the pool) of 25 yards each. A coach can tell the fourth place finisher, "Your total time kept you from scoring points, but your third split was better than your practice times" (J. Brislin, 2000).

## 2. Punctuality

The distinction between clock and event time assists us to understand one of the most frequent complaints that sojourners bring home after business trips or international assignments. When asked about memorable events that brought frustrations, sojourners often refer to difficulties surrounding punctuality. If a business meeting is called at 9:00 a.m., at what time does the meeting start? When are people considered late such that they would have to call attention to themselves and apologise upon entering the meeting room? In cultures known to be highly concerned with clock time (e.g. USA, countries in Western Europe), the answer is that people would have to apologise if they were five minutes late. People in clock time cultures often think in units of five minutes as a way to organise their workdays. In other countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia), the unit of analysis is 15 minutes, and so people would have to be 20 minutes late to a meeting before feeling the need to comment (Ali & Azim, 1996). Additional complexity comes when working in cultures where event time, status differences, and workplace hierarchies are taken seriously. People who agreed to the 9:00 a.m. starting time may have found themselves participating in an unexpected event at 8:50 a.m., and this event (e.g. advising subordinates who popped in with last minute questions) has to proceed until its completion. If one of the people who agreed to the 9:00 a.m. starting time has a prestigious title within the organisation, there can be additional reasons for delays. High status people can communicate their position in a hierarchy by making lower status people wait for them, and high status people do not have to apologise for their lack of punctuality.

If they have had previous international experiences, most business people recognise differences in what behaviors are considered punctual. In some countries, people will indicate the norms for punctuality by saying, “The meeting will be at 9:00 a.m., \_\_\_\_\_ time.” By inserting the name of a country or state, the norm is indicated. For meetings where people can show up at 9:30 or later, we have heard the words “Malaysian”, “Filipino”, and “Hawaiian” time as the insertion to indicate low concern with punctuality. The term “rubber” time can be inserted for the same purpose if people don’t care to indicate a specific country. If the starting time of the meeting is to be taken seriously, the name of a clock time culture would be inserted, such as “American” or “Japanese”.

## 3. Task and Social Time during the Workday

People who have worked in more than one culture can almost always answer this question. “In the companies for which you have worked, what per cent of time do people typically spend on tasks that are part of their job

description? What per cent of time do they spend on social activities, such as informal chatting, parties for various birthdays and anniversaries, sipping tea and coffee with others, and so forth?" Answers can vary widely (Manrai & Manrai, 1995). For companies in big cities in the United States, a typical answer is "80 per cent task time, 20 per cent social time". In India, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, and some Latin American countries, the answer is often, "50 per cent task time, 50 per cent social time". Sojourning business people familiar with a "80 per cent task" workday often have very negative reactions to a "50-50" pattern and make judgments such as "inefficient", "time wasting", and "non-competitive in a fast moving world economy". The problem with such reactions is that they are ethnocentric: people are making conclusions based on the norms and values of their own cultures. Another approach is to move beyond initial reactions and to ask exactly what people *in the other culture* are doing during the time that seems to be spent in aimless socialising and chatting. Workers may be developing supportive work relationships during this socialising that can be called upon later when work needs to be done quickly and well. Perhaps people have to invest some late night hours in unpaid overtime. If they have developed supportive relationships with others during socialising hours, they can ask these others to help out and to volunteer the extra hours. Socialising during the workday occurs frequently in collectivist cultures where people develop their identity in terms of relationships to others. Socialising leads to relationship development, and the relationships lead to collaborative task accomplishment.

In collective cultures, work gets done through webs of relationships. In China, such webs are part of one's *guanxi*, or relationships with important others who can grant favors (Fang, 1999). *Guanxi* can be transferred from one person to another. If Jack has a long-established *guanxi* relationship with Mr Xie, then Jack can transfer this relationship to Zhihong. Jack would call Mr Xie and ask him to schedule a meeting with Zhihong. Perhaps the issue is obtaining a permit to exceed an import quota. Given his relationship with Jack, Mr Xie is likely to agree to the meeting. Where did Jack and Mr Xie develop this relationship such that *guanxi* networks can be passed on? The relationship would be established during the socialising time during the workday. In cultures with a large amount of socialising time, sojourners are well advised to determine if task-related events occur during this seemingly wasted time. If important events can be identified, sojourners should participate in the socialising during the workday.

#### 4. Polychronic and Monochronic Time Use

At first glance polychronicity, people's tendency to work on several activities at a given time, looks like the typical behavior of busy American CEOs,

who master the art of wolfing down lunch while talking on the phone and checking email simultaneously. After all, power breakfast and business lunches are common examples of American idiosyncrasies that utilize the “killing two birds with one stone” strategy. The concept of time as a valued commodity that should be used wisely and not wasted but saved now applies not only to time pressed CEOs, but also to almost the entire American population.

However, ironically, Hall’s original concept of Polychronic (P-time) and Monochronic time (M-time) schedules put European Americans in a relatively Monochronic category (Hall, 1983; Bluedorn, 1998). In P-time people perform many things at one given setting, while in M-time people focus on a single task at a time. Hall’s original concept of P-time is very similar to Event time, and he argued that it might be found more frequently in the Middle East, Latin American, or African countries, where people’s attitude toward time is more lenient and the emphasis is on people and events rather than schedules. His experience with a Latino cattle trader who conducted business in an office full of visitors made Hall categorise European-Americans as M-time. Executives from these parts of the world worked on one thing at a time and stressed undivided attention to the person they were dealing with, rather than interacting with multiple people at once similar to the cattle trader. Kaufman, Lane, and Linquist (1991) tried to find out whether Americans are relatively polychronic or not by measuring their attitudes toward multitask work habits. The mean score for 310 research participants was 3.18 within the range 1.0 (monochronic) to 5.0 (polychronic). This finding located Americans in the middle of the spectrum.

Then how can we understand seemingly polychronic American CEOs, as well as the general American population who eat and talk on the cell phones while driving? First, we should keep in mind that there are individual differences, which may not be explained by culture level distinctions. Just as not every CEO is an aggressive, task-oriented overachiever, not every business person is doing several tasks at a time. Second, as Bluedorn, Kaufman, and Lane (1992) suggested, the polychronic–monochronic distinction does not have to be limited to individual tendencies and it might extend to organisational culture. In that case, there is a possibility that a monochronic individual learns to work in a polychronic manner because of work requirements, or vice versa. Third, we believe that we need to integrate another dimension: clock and event time may be added to understand the P-time and M-time dimension better, as shown in Table 1. Hall’s (1959) original concept of M-time people, who are comfortable with dealing with one thing at a time, may be divided into those who are clock time oriented and those who are not.

The *traditional* Asian time schedule may belong to cell 4 (e.g. things are more relaxed and not overly clock oriented, and it is not proper to do many

TABLE 1  
Polychronic vs. Monochronic and Clock Time vs. Event Time

	<i>Clock time</i>	<i>Event time</i>
	<p>Emphasis is on time; time sensitive Schedule evolves around the clock</p> <p>Cell 1: The US</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pace of life is fast</li> <li>● The US has been traditionally M-type; however, is moving toward P-time</li> </ul>	<p>Emphasis is on people; time insensitive Schedule evolves around the events</p> <p>Cell 2: Latin America, Mediterranean countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pace of life is slow</li> <li>● Not overly keen to schedule (cf. rubber time, island time, etc.)</li> <li>● Business and social activities often mix</li> </ul>
<p>Polychronic (P-time) Doing more than one activity at a time</p>	<p>Cell 3: East Asian countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pace of life is fast</li> <li>● Traditionally Asian countries have been event time; however, economic development and other changes have led them into a clock time orientation</li> </ul>	<p>Cell 4: Non-industrialised cultures where resources are abundant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pace of life is slow</li> <li>● People work hard and socialise, but unlike P-time, work and socialising do not mix</li> </ul>
<p>Monochronic (M-time) Doing one activity at a time</p>		

things at a time). *Modern* and *industrialised* Asians (e.g. Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, etc.) are in cell 3. These people have realised that they should pay more attention to deadlines and speed to do business with Western business people. In the same way, if traditional or typical Americans are in cell 3, they are moving toward cell 1, a combination of clock time and polychronic time use. Instead of trying to save time by speeding up, they've found out they can achieve more by doing several tasks at once to best utilise precious time. It would be interesting to see in which direction Latin American and Middle Eastern people are moving. Our prediction is that they may be adapting to clock time and moving from cell 2 to cell 1. After all, not so many people can escape from watches and clocks nowadays, which remind them to keep up with other people in other cultures. The world is seeing fast-moving change, and people's attitude toward time is not an exception given the presence of globalisation and the internationalisation of business ventures.

## 5. Work and Leisure Time

Work is part of human life. People work for various reasons and acquiring money and resources to have leisure time is one of them. It sounds like an oxymoron to work to earn time to relax, but it is not uncommon to hear people saying they work to retire early, or to save money to enjoy their vacations. Although it is universal for people to have balanced schedules of work and leisure, the ratio between work and leisure may be different across cultures and across time. European countries were traditionally stoic toward work, partly due to their work ethic. However, their economic development, which started after the Second World War and their highly developed welfare systems enable them to enjoy the longest number of vacation days in the world (Richards, 1999). Leisure and vacations have become the most important events in many people's lives. Good advice for people dealing with Europeans is to know the month they are taking their vacations. It is improper to expect Europeans to interrupt their vacations to answer business-related inquiries. At least for some European countries, vacations become a social right, whereas people in other countries consider them a luxury (Hofstede, 2001). The US and Japan are two countries famous for long working hours and on-task intensity during the work. Well-known terms, such as "workaholic" (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and "karoshi" (Robinson & Godbey, 1999), or death through overwork, symbolise people's general attitude toward work in these countries. Unlike Europeans who regard their leisure time as important as or more important than work time, Americans put priority to their work, because they are afraid of being left behind by the competition. Or worse, Japanese fear they may lose their jobs if they take too much time off.

In developed countries at least, working hours are decreasing. The development of technology has freed people from substantial hours of manual work, and the concern for quality of life has brought more paid holidays. However, less work time does not equate with longer leisure time. People may need more time preparing for work. For example, looking for a more desirable home environment, people spread out to suburban areas, forcing them to commute for longer hours. Moreover, more people want to work longer and earn more money than work less and earn less. An increased standard of living demands that people work harder and longer to earn enough money to spend on items that were once considered luxuries. Contrary to the concept of a leisure class, Robinson and Godbey's (1999) time diary study in the US shows that people who are at least college educated and people with higher income work longer hours than high school graduates.

Another study shows that Europeans have time intensive vacations with relaxation as a goal, while Americans and Japanese have money intensive vacation patterns (Richards, 1999). Being competitive and aggressive in work, Americans and Japanese regard leisure time as time that needs to be planned carefully and to be filled with meaningful activities.

## PACE OF LIFE

The common theme for the next five issues is the speed of life and the implications that result from how fast or slow people move about during typical workdays.

### 6. Fast and Slow Paces of Life

The importance people place on clocks, watches, and time is a major determinant of the how fast people move, and how fast basic business dealings are transacted, in different countries. Robert Levine (1997) was interested in the effects of a fast or slow pace of life in different cultures. His research began with an observation that many world travelers have experienced. In some cultures, time is taken very seriously; people rush from one place to another, punctuality is important, and so forth. In other cultures, people do not put as much emphasis on time. They seem to move much more slowly from place to place and time efficiency in the completion of everyday tasks seems unimportant. For example, if people are waiting in line for service in a store, there seems to be little concern among the people that the line is moving slowly. If cars stop in the middle of a street so that drivers can talk with each other, people waiting behind the cars do not quickly honk their horns.

Levine and his colleagues looked at people's pace of life through analysis of three experiments set up under similar conditions in 31 countries. The experiments dealt with walking speed in urban areas (measured with a

stopwatch), the amount of time people had to wait for service at a post office, and the accuracy of clocks compared with the international standard. Countries where the pace of life was fast, and where time (according to these three measures) was taken seriously rank high in economic productivity as measured by the per capita gross national product index. These countries include Switzerland, Germany, Ireland, and England. Countries where their pace of life was slower show agreement with the observations of world travelers. These countries include El Salvador, Brazil, Indonesia, and Mexico, and these are countries with a relatively low GDP. Explanations of this finding would include a concern that the efficient use of time would have implications for such business issues as attentiveness to customers' schedules, stock market opening and closings around the world, and effective scheduling of decision making meetings in the workplace. However, there is a major difficulty that threatens workers in countries with a fast pace of life.

Countries with a fast pace of life also have very high indices of coronary heart disease. The behaviors associated with a fast pace of life, such as the pressures of deadlines and the necessity of demonstrating productivity as measured by output per hour, cause stress-related illnesses such as heart disease. Time pressures have other negative implications for health, such as short lunch hours where fast food (with its high fat content) is gobbled down quickly. There was one exception to the finding of "fast pace of life, high gross national products (GDP), but high levels of coronary heart disease". This country is Japan. Despite recent slowdowns, the long-term analysis of Japan's GDP since the Second World War has been stunning. The pace of life was fast according to Levine's measurements, yet Japan's coronary heart rate is low. Possible reasons include Japan's tradition of a low fat diet, which consists mostly of grains, vegetables, and fish, with almost no red meat. Another reason may be the presence of social support (Marmot, 1983).

Japan is a collectivist culture, and this well-researched dimension includes the important point that people's basic identity as human beings includes their relationships with others (Triandis, 1995). In individualist cultures, in contrast, people's basic identity includes their own goals, attitudes, and opinions and does not necessarily include their relationships with others. Individualism is captured by terms such as "hard driving person", "goal directed worker", and "achievement oriented". People in individualist cultures may be very productive and efficient, but they do not necessarily have an extensive social support network to help them deal with stress. Collectivism is captured by terms such as "cooperative worker", "good team player", and "ready to pitch in and help others". In collectivist Japan, people who are stressed from time pressures have others to offer a sympathetic ear, to assist in the workplace when deadlines are imminent, and to offer advice that might prove helpful. The benefits of social support as a buffer between life stressors and stress-related disease is well documented.

If international executives must participate in fast moving, stress inducing activities to remain competitive and to insure business financial success, they can consider adding various types of social support to provide a buffer between a culture's time consciousness and employee health (Taylor, Repette, & Seeman, 1997). Such support can include company outings where employees have the opportunity to develop stronger interpersonal relationships, training programs in stress management, exercise rooms within the organisation, team building training where employees learn to assist one another in the pursuit of mutually agreed upon goals, and so forth.

## 7. Dealing with Long Periods of Silence

In addition to decisions about how much time to spend socialising, there are other cultural differences that sojourners must understand about workday events. Several of these differences will be encountered at business meetings. Encountering long periods of silence at meetings can be especially frustrating for Americans and Western Europeans. People from these parts of the world often interpret silence as a signal that something should be said to fill the time and to keep the meeting going. They don't realise that people from other cultures (many Asian and Pacific Island nations) are quite comfortable with silence (Brislin, 2000). They feel that it allows people to collect their thoughts and to think carefully about their next contribution. In negotiations, Americans will sometimes misinterpret long periods of silence as a signal that they should make a concession. Their negotiating counterparts in Asia know this and will sometimes prolong their silence in the expectation that a concession will be made.

In collectivist cultures, it is important to show respect for others and to forge cooperative alliances (Triandis, 1995). If people at business meetings do not have strong preferences for a course of action, they may remain silent, listen carefully to others, and later try to integrate diverse comments into a workable suggestion. These integrative suggestions, which often reflect people's views of an emerging consensus of opinion, may come at the end of a long meeting. This "listen and later integrate" role is unfamiliar to some people. These people may come from cultures where everyone is expected to make suggestions at multiple points during the meeting. People making the integrative comments at the end of a meeting may be seen as indecisive individuals who were unwilling to participate in the give and take of idea sharing and sharpening.

## 8. Past, Present, and Future Orientation

Having a relatively long life span together with their large brains, human beings have the capability of remembering the past, preparing for the future

to come, and living in the present. People are living on a time line, which does not have either a beginning point or an end point. Even though they live in the present, people always look back toward the past or forward into the future. People value new things, but also cherish old memories. Some people live in the past reminiscing about the good old days, and some look toward the future waiting for good things to happen.

The analysis of past, present, and future orientations is another interesting tool to understand culture's time use. Cultures do not necessarily have only one orientation to the exclusion of others. It is rare for any culture to have only a past, present, or a future orientation. For example, Americans do not linger on the past, but they live in the present fully and are also future oriented. They want to move on. In contrast, past orientation emphasises tradition and values time honored approaches. Some European and Asian countries are known for their long histories and it is not surprising to find that they are inclined toward tradition, and their behaviors are influenced by cultural values from the past. Chinese people's strong brand loyalty is attributed to their past orientation, implying the importance of tradition in marketing application (Yau, 1988). Italians also are known for their respect for tradition and craftsmanship based on a long history of excellence in products related to the arts (Francesco & Gold, 1998). If practices have worked for thousands of years, why try a new method? Past oriented cultures tend to take a long-term perspective, are risk averse, and emphasise stability across time. In real managerial practice, the past orientation may be found in the form of idealisation of company founders, recognising long-term partnerships, and the use of time-tested business strategies. It would be wise to have a well-established and well-known go-between when engaging in a new relationship with a past oriented company. Also, counterparts in past oriented cultures will take note of individuals that have a good track record and a reputation for long-term success.

People living in present-oriented cultures live in the here and now and usually have short-term perspectives. Time efficiency is regarded as important and people are constantly reminded not to waste time. Time is viewed as a scarce resource, so people divide it into much smaller scales to keep good record of its use. A good example would be American performance appraisal systems, which evaluate employees annually, and financial assessment measures which track performance quarterly, monthly, or even weekly. For people in a present orientation, staying at one job for a long time is not considered a virtue; therefore, people migrate from job to job for better salaries and benefits. Loyalty to a company does not necessarily have a temporal meaning. Employees are expected to be loyal to the company, of course, but that does not mean that they should work in that company until they retire. Year-to-year contracts, while found in some Asian companies nowadays, are found more often in present-oriented cultures. The

practice of short-term relationships may act as a double-edged sword. For companies, retaining skilled employees may be costly and they have to worry about labor supply, but they have chances to hire a well-equipped workforce when new employees are needed. For employees, there is no such thing as job security, but they have flexibility in their career development.

On the other hand, those living in future-oriented cultures usually have a long-term perspective. People routinely do things expecting future returns. Ironically, Chinese are known for their long-term perspective despite their respect for past. They are known for planting slow growing trees for their grandchildren. The traditional practice of lifetime employment in East Asia reflects a long-term orientation in those countries.

An example that illustrates this concept occurred at an executive training session for elite young pilots and middle managers from Korean Airlines. The first author of this paper, who was conducting the session, asked the participants to raise their hands if they envisioned themselves working at the same company for the next 20 years. Contrary to his preconception of long time commitment of Asian business practice and to his dismay, nobody raised his or her hand. He thought about the rapid changes in Asian countries for a moment, but soon realised his mistake and asked the same question again. This time instead of 20, he asked about a 30-year commitment and everyone raised his or her hand. In their early thirties, the Korean pilots and managers did not want to leave the company until they retired.

Another aspect of future orientation is the relatively longer period of time to get events started. Planning for the future requires more time. For example, American business people become frustrated by Japanese counterparts' seemingly inefficient use of time (to the American efficiency-focused mind) spent getting to know each other (Dale, 1992). American business men should be patient with the Japanese practice of "taking time" for what they consider important matters. Since the Japanese work with a relatively long-term perspective, they invest substantial amounts of time in relationship building and *pre-preparation*. They do not just "get to the point", as Americans prefer. Also, people with a future orientation may need longer time for important decisions, and sometimes there are long delays along the course of action. These planning delays are used to check the progress of steps toward decision implementation and goal accomplishment.

## 9. Time as a Symbol

A comparative study of Asian and American CEOs' work style provides a good example of different time use and managerial styles (Doktor, 1990). Both American and Asian (Hong Kong and Korean) CEOs had extremely large amounts of work and worked almost the same workload each day. However, the difference was in the use of their time. American CEOs

divided their time into small chunks, had many short meetings, and kept very tight schedules minute by minute. On the other hand, Asian CEOs had fewer but longer meetings, maintained relatively unstructured schedules, and had room for the unexpected. Asian CEOs' longer meetings and less structured schedules do not imply they were less efficient or they were more careless with time than their American counterparts. On the contrary, it might indicate higher productivity since less time was required for settling down and engaging in formalities. If a typical CEO needs 10 minutes for warm-up and 10 minutes for closing the meeting, an Asian CEO, who has five meetings a day, will spend 100 minutes for non-crucial matters. An American counterpart will need at least double the amount of warming and closing time for his or her 10 meetings, even considering the American "get to the point" style.

Besides the issue of productivity, why do Asian CEOs spend more time per meeting than American counterparts? They may show their long-term perspective regarding time. Or they may invest longer periods of time devoted to selected issues as a symbol of importance. Time can symbolise many things, and some of the most common symbols are discussed below.

*Time as Money.* Some people say "time is money" and they may believe it in their hearts. People from clock time cultures are most likely to put a monetary value on time and treat it as a tangible commodity. After all, people are paid by the hour for their work, and they sometimes try to buy time with money by purchasing gadgets that promise to save time. Or they may hire other people to do their less challenging work, so they can put "saved" time to better use. The emphasis on punctuality, meeting deadlines, and efficient use of time is found in industrialised countries regardless of their cultural orientations. However, the monetary analogy of time does not apply to all countries. For example, the common practice of paying an hourly rate for some services, such as legal counseling or babysitting, is not as common in some Asian countries. It is considered rather vulgar to pay penny by penny for such personal matters. Time is considered a less tangible and vague commodity. Even if valuable, paying by exact duration of time is not proper. Lawyers may be paid by the case, instead of billing hours, and two hours of babysitting may be repaid by nice meals or considered as a favor to return some day in the near future.

*Time as an Indication of Status.* Robert Levine (1997) suggested that the relationship between time and power might be illustrated as "the rules of the waiting game". The more power and influence you have, the longer you can make people wait for you. Patients wait quietly at the doctor's office, since the doctor's time is considered more valuable than that of patients (Robinson & Godbey, 1999). People understand (at least they say

they understand) when their boss is running late. Powerful people control less powerful people's time. When two people arrange a meeting, it is very natural for the less powerful person to accommodate to the more powerful individual's busy schedule. After all, the time of the powerful is more valuable than that of the less powerful.

*Time as Importance.* People routinely equate importance and more time and with a good reason. They are aware of the "zero-sum" property of time (Robinson & Godbey, 1999). If they increase time spent on some tasks, they have to decrease time for other activities. If an issue is not significant, people want to make a quick decision and move on to more important matters. If a decision has major or far-reaching consequences, people usually think they need a longer period of time to think it over. It is natural to consider more issues if the consequences of an action are likely to be wide-ranging and important. There are some symbolic gestures regarding "taking one's time". People are willing to wait longer if they perceive that the decisions are important. It is expected that more powerful people will take more time to come up with decisions since powerful people should not be bothered with routine or trivial matters.

## 10. Time Efficiency: Who Finishes First?

"Deadline" is one of the English business words that does not need translation in other parts of the world. For example, in Korea the word is something that sounds like "Ded-la-in". There are other Korean words with similar meaning, of course, but those words do not usually deliver the urgency of "ded-la-in". Because of their highly time sensitive nature, Americans and some Europeans are keen to keep deadlines and they value efficiency most of all. Also they value time as an asset; therefore, saving time is a virtue. Fast service equates with good service in the US, and this does not necessarily apply to the rest of world. The problem is that efficiency does not guarantee the optimal level of outcome. There is a danger of compromised quality because of the emphasis on speed and strict deadline. There are numerous disasters caused by shoddy workmanship, which could be prevented if enough time was given for the task. Recently Asian countries with long-term value oriented traditions have adopted the speed of Western cultures. In some cases, disasters have proved the danger of speeding up without insuring quality. Research has indicated that airline pilots in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea are hesitant to insist on delays in scheduled departures to deviate from flight plans, even if the deviation would increase safety (Merritt, 2000).

Another interesting topic involving time is the importance of patience. Aided by technology, people are becoming relatively freer from the burden

of waiting. Microwaves, bullet trains, and Concorde are just a few inventions that have cut time dramatically. However, there are still many things for which people must wait so that nature can take her course. It is not difficult to put more resources to decrease time on some tasks. If a person needs ten hours to finish the job, technically speaking, two people can finish it in five hours. However, will ten people finish it in one hour? That is a very unlikely situation. There are so many variables affecting human performance that sometimes waiting for maturation is the wisest policy for the best results. The performance of multicultural work teams provides a good example. Textbooks point out that culturally (e.g. gender, nationality, age, etc.) homogeneous groups often achieve work goals faster than culturally heterogeneous groups (Francesco & Gold, 1998; Greenberg & Baron, 2000). The former need less time to get to know each other since they share similar experiences. However, more current research shows that highly heterogeneous teams outperform moderately heterogeneous groups in the long run (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). Heterogeneous members bring unique experiences and insights to a group and therefore have more varied and creative contributions to offer toward goal accomplishment. This is good news for many multinational companies in this global business era. However, these benefits do not come quickly and "patience" is the word to remember. Heterogeneous group members need some initial time to settle down, to become comfortable with each other, to become knowledgeable about cultural differences, and to prepare to work as a team. This may not be easy to accept for some companies, which aim for short-term results. For example, they know differences in how time is used, as summarized in Table 2.

## CONCLUSION

Many dimensions involved in people's use of time have potentially positive and potentially negative outcomes. A fast pace of life can lead to economic productivity but perhaps at the cost of stress-related health difficulties. The time people spend socialising at work can seem inefficient but such time can be an investment in network development that can be drawn upon when important tasks are to be accomplished. A short-term orientation toward commitment to an organisation can force people to keep themselves marketable but current employers may not be able to benefit from the employees' skill development. Knowing the downsides of various time dimensions can sometimes allow attention to be given to ameliorative features, such as Japanese social support that may balance the health threats of a fast lifestyle. As with many aspects of diversity, the more people know about advantages and potential difficulties, the more they can benefit from the variety and creativity that an understanding of cultural diversity can bring.

TABLE 2  
Advice for Successful Intercultural Business Dealing

<i>Time concept</i>	<i>Advice for successful intercultural business dealing</i>
Clock and event time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Try to identify where the emphasis is and make adjustments: Do people and events have priority or is sticking to a schedule more important?</li> </ul>
Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recognise whether you are in clock or event time: Expect to be flexible if you are in event time</li> <li>● Find the basic unit of time: Is it 5 minutes, 15 or 30?</li> </ul>
Task and social time during the work day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Socialising during work is a part of life in some collective cultures, therefore sojourners should participate in after-work socialisation</li> </ul>
Polychronic and monochronic time use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In some cultures, the business lunch is devoted to socialising with business partners</li> <li>● It may be hard to figure out what activities can be combined and what cannot: ask hosts about this aspect of their culture</li> </ul>
Work and leisure time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Be aware of importance of vacations in some of the cultures you are dealing with</li> <li>● Find out the typical vacation season and important holidays and make necessary adjustments (e.g. the last week of May is the Japanese golden holiday)</li> </ul>
Fast and slow paces of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A fast pace can lead to stress-related health problems</li> <li>● Social support can lessen these problems</li> </ul>
Dealing with long periods of silence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Try not to be intimidated by long periods of silence</li> <li>● People don't always have to fill gaps</li> <li>● Sometimes the period of silence symbolises the importance of an issue</li> </ul>
Past, present and future orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dealing with past and future orientation: Cultivate long-term partnerships. Show a good track record of past accomplishment</li> <li>● Dealing with present orientation: Focusing on the past can be seen as time wasting</li> </ul>
Time as symbol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Time is not money in some cultures and treating it in monetary terms may be considered vulgar</li> </ul>
Time efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Speed is not always a virtue</li> <li>● Multicultural teams need more time to achieve their peak performance level; however, they may be more effective after they become comfortable working with each other for some time</li> </ul>

## REFERENCES

- Adler, N. (1997). *International dimensions of organizational behavior* (3rd edn.). Boston: PWS-Kent.
- Ali, A., & Azim, A. (1996). A cross-national perspective on managerial problems in a non-western country. *Journal of Social Psychology, 136*, 165–172.
- Bluedorn, A.C. (1998). An interview with anthropologist Edward T. Hall. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 7*(2), 109–115.
- Bluedorn, A.C., Kaufman, C.F., & Lane, P.M. (1992). How many things do you like to do at once? An introduction to monochronic and polychronic time. *Academy of Management Executive, 6*(4), 17–26.
- Brislin, J. (2000). Women's swimming team head coach, Dartmouth College, Personal communication, 9 May.
- Brislin, R. (2000). *Understanding culture's influence on behavior* (2nd edn.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.
- Cushner, K., & Brislin, R. (1996). *Intercultural interactions: A practical guide* (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dale, T. (1992). Working with Japan. *Executive Excellence*. April: 17–18.
- Doktor, R.H. (1990). Asian and American CEOs: A comparative study. *Organizational Dynamics, 18*(3), 46–57.
- Earley, P.C., & Mosakowski, E. (2000). Creating hybrid team culture: An empirical test of transnational team functioning. *Academy of Management Journal, 43*, 26–49.
- Fang, T. (1999). *Chinese business negotiating style*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Francesco, A.M., & Gold, B.A. (1998). *International organizational behavior: Text, readings, cases and skills*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Greenberg, J., & Baron, R. (2000). *Behavior in organizations* (7th edn.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hall, E.T. (1983). *The dance of life: The other dimension*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across cultures* (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kaufman, C.F., Lane, P.M., & Lindquist, J. (1991). Exploring more than 24 hours a day: A preliminary investigation of polychronic time use. *Journal of Consumer Research, 18*, 392–401.
- Levine, R. (1997). *A geography of time*. New York: Basic Books.
- Levine, R., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). The pace of life in 31 countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30*, 178–205.
- Manrai, L., & Manrai, A. (1995). Effects of cultural-context, gender, and acculturation on perceptions of work versus social/leisure time usage. *Journal of Business Research, 32*, 115–128.
- Marmot, M.G. (1983). Stress, social and cultural variations in heart disease. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 27*(5), 377–384.
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W., & Leiter, M. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 397–422.

- Merritt, A. (2000). Culture in the cockpit: Do Hofstede's dimensions replicate? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 31*, 283–301.
- Osland, J.S., & Bird, A. (2000). Beyond sophisticated stereotyping: Cultural sense-making in context. *Academy of Management Executive, 14*(1), 65–79.
- Richards, G. (1999). Vacations and the quality of life: Patterns and structures. *Journal of Business Research, 44*, 189–198.
- Robinson, J.P., & Godbey, G. (1999). *Time for life: The surprising ways Americans use their time*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Taylor, S., Replete, R., & Seeman, T. (1997). Health psychology: What is an unhealthy environment and how does it get under the skin? *Annual Review of Psychology, 48*, 411–447.
- Triandis, H. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Yau, O.H.M. (1988). Chinese cultural values: Their dimensions and marketing implications. *European Journal of Marketing, 22*(5), 44–58.