

Communication across Cultures in the Workplace: Swimming in Scandinavian Waters

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Abstract

This paper looks at the way cultural influences affect communication, concentrating on how Scandinavian culture affects communication style. The paper starts out by providing an understanding about how crucial it is to comprehend cultural nuances in communication and the difficulties that can result from misunderstandings. Then, it looks at the cultural aspects of communication, such as context, worldview, social norms, and power relationships. The paper explores the fundamental tenets of Scandinavian culture that have influenced local communication norms, including social equality, achieving consensus, and indirect communication. The authors underline the need of cultural sensitivity and understanding for effective communication through a review of pertinent literature and case examples from such nations as the United States, Middle East, Japan, and China that illustrate how cultural elements play a crucial role in defining communication practices. Finally, the authors offer insights into the distinctive features of the Scandinavian communication style to advance knowledge of how cultural influences affect communication.

Keywords

Cross-Cultural Communication, Context, Cultural Factors, Scandinavian Culture, Communication Styles

1. Introduction

In the meeting between people, there will always be similarities and differences that affect how we understand each other. Some of what creates variation are cultural differences. Cultural differences affect how we see the world and the codes we use to send and receive messages (Gay, 2013). One image of the rela-

relationship between people and culture is the connection between the fish and the sea: the sea is essential for the fish to live, but the fish is oftentimes unaware that it surrounds them. The fish impacts the sea, just as the sea influences the fish. If the fish gets lost in uncharted waters, it may struggle. If the sea disappears, the fish will lie gasping on land and suddenly be aware that what earlier was taken for granted and felt like home is no longer around them. Similarly, humans suddenly become aware of the cultural framework surrounding them when taken from the familiar. Cultural codes are intertwined in everything we do; they arise and are constantly recreated in social interactions with others around us (Gay, 2013). At the same time, culture is what enables us to interact and creates identity, giving us common codes and rules that we use when we generate meaning.

Having a culturally diverse workplace can be a great strength for an organization (Mujtaba, 2022). Earlier research has shown that organizations with a more culturally diverse workforce have greater revenue, net income, and CEO income (Hartenian & Gudmundson, 2000). Such research should be of motivation for managers to create a culturally diverse workplace. With succeeding in the creation of a diverse workforce comes ensuing cultural belonging. Cultural belonging is important to all of us because it helps to give us an identity. Through socialization, we grow into society's culture and develop our personal identity. In a functional multicultural society, several different cultures happily coexist, and there can be several ethnic groups working synergistically. Diversity as a concept is about acceptance, respect, accessibility, equity, inclusion, and belonging (Mujtaba, 2022). Everyone is unique; the challenge lies in recognizing these individual differences yet being able to effectively communicate across cultures (Patrick & Kumar, 2012).

It is evident that the perks of having a culturally diverse workplace are many and clear. A culturally diverse workplace empowers people to develop their personal talents and skills, while still being their authentic selves. With a workplace consisting of several cultures, there will be a wide range of ideas and expertise, enabling people to learn from a more diverse collection of colleagues. What's more, a culturally diverse workplace can also boost problem-solving capabilities and increase happiness, productivity, and workplace belonging (Mujtaba, 2022). However, communication across cultures comes with its own set of challenges, especially in decoding messages and body language. Communication and culture are closely linked; it can even be said to be two sides of the same coin. Our research focus in this paper is to determine how cultural factors affect the way people communicate in the Nordic region (such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, etc.), and what aspects of the Scandinavian culture have affected their communication style?

2. Cross-Cultural Literature

One gains intercultural competencies by researching communication across cul-

tures and learning about them for application in day-to-day conversations. This helps compromise, understand, seek solutions, and work toward mutual understanding. Researching cross-cultural communication can give us a new set of eyes, helping us to look inwards, and better understand the people around us. Cross-cultural communication involves understanding cultural differences; for example, the Scandinavian culture has unique cultural traits. Practical evidence can support the idea that cultural differences contribute to variations in habit and behaviors. Cultural differences can impact communication and should be considered in expatriate interactions. Awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences can improve cross-cultural communication.

Learning social constructions, or the so-called negotiation processes, and real objects can contribute to understanding culture and society through language (Mujtaba, 2014). In researching this topic, finding relevant literature is essential, all of which can be found under diversity, cross-cultural, and international management type of references. Moreover, a general understanding of Scandinavia, where it is, and what it is known for is beneficial to have to study their style of communication.

Cross-cultural communication is essential in creating a thriving workplace, particularly when working with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In the case of Scandinavia, where cultural norms and values differ significantly from other regions, a thoughtful approach to cross-cultural communication is especially important. However, introducing cross-cultural communication strategies in the workplace may not be well-founded in some cases, requiring further consideration. It is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies and their potential impact on the workplace culture before implementing them. By taking the time to consider the unique challenges posed by cross-cultural communication in Scandinavia, businesses can create a more inclusive and productive workplace.

2.1. Scandinavia

Scandinavia is a region in Northern Europe that includes the countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The region is known for its stunning natural landscapes, progressive social policies, and rich cultural heritage. Scandinavia is also home to some of the world's happiest and most prosperous societies, with high levels of social welfare, equality, and quality of life. One of the defining features of Scandinavian societies is their emphasis on social welfare and equality. The Nordic model of social democracy, which combines market capitalism with strong social safety nets and progressive taxation, has been a hallmark of Scandinavian societies for decades. This model has helped to reduce poverty, promote equality, and ensure that basic human needs are met for all members of society.

Scandinavia is also known for its stunning natural landscapes, which range from creeks and mountains to forests and coastlines. The region has numerous national parks and nature reserves where visitors can enjoy hiking, skiing, fish-

ing, and other outdoor activities. The region's natural beauty has been a source of inspiration for artists, writers, and musicians for centuries.

In addition to their natural beauty, Scandinavian countries are also known for their rich cultural heritage. From Viking history to contemporary design, the region has a vibrant and diverse cultural scene. Scandinavian literature, film, music, and art have gained international recognition and acclaim, and the region is home to numerous museums, galleries, and cultural institutions. Scandinavia has a unique blend of natural beauty, social progress, and cultural heritage. Its societies are known for their commitment to social welfare and equality and their appreciation for nature and the arts.

2.2. Communication and Culture—Hand in Hand

In order to comprehend how to effectively communicate across cultures, an understanding of general communication is helpful. What exactly is communication, and what factors must be involved to explain what happens when we communicate with each other? The word itself comes from the Latin word "*communicare*", which means "to do something in common" which is something we can see that communication encompasses (Zayniddinovn & Sharofiddinovich, 2021). Communication is an integral part of living and being human. It is fundamental both in our relationships with each other and for society to function. The knowledge we have of communication is something we have developed over a long time, for example, as early as in ancient times, the basic concepts of rhetoric were developed. These describe various aspects of communication and are still in use today. Communication is what enables us to share thoughts, feelings, and opinions with each other; it binds people together, making it a fundamental part of society (Luhmann, 1992).

3. Culture Makes Communication Possible

Culture is what makes communication possible. We understand each other because we share a joint "store" of meaning with others in similar cultural communities (Komissarov, 1991). We use what we have "in store" when we decode and encode the meaning in the messages we communicate. We use verbal and non-verbal signs according to the rules and social norms that apply to our cultural communities. This constitutes the abstract framework for communication and the cultural context.

The challenge is that cultural differences can create misunderstandings when we have different cultural references or codes to create and interpret meaning. A classic model to use to understand communication is the Process Model. The name of the model emphasizes what the model focuses on, the process of communication—meaning how the information is processed from the sender to the recipient. Originally, the Process Model was created to describe how messages were transferred on a technical basis. In 1948, the model became known as a mathematical theory of communication. It was the researchers Shannon and

Weaver who created the model. Key concepts in the model include sending, encoding, channeling, decoding, receiving, feedback, and noise in the environment.

As seen in **Figure 1**, the communication process between the source and receiver has several factors. The intended message may not always be the same as the negotiated meaning. A person's field of experience and expertise can also play a significant role in the communication process (Sulaiman, Hussin, & Amir, 2019: p. 82); having experience and knowledge of several different cultures can increase chances of the negotiated meaning being the intended messages.

Noise in communication is about what stands in the way of a message arriving as intended. It can be noise in the form of background music that makes a telephone conversation difficult, bad network that causes the online chat to "lag", a challenging accent on the part of the sender, or a distracting habit that the sender has that makes it difficult to focus on the message. By using concepts from the communication models, we can say that cultural factors can lead to noise in communication (Komissarov, 1991). Being able to communicate appropriately with people of different cultural codes than oneself is having intercultural competence. The challenge is to spot which cultural factors influence communication, and what cultural norm one is dealing with. Culture can sometimes feel invisible; it is important to identify whose "water" we're "swimming" in.

3.1. Cultural Factors in Communication

Cultural factors vary in different cultural communities. This can affect how we communicate with each other. Cultural factors are important because they largely determine the attitudes, values, and norms that employees, partners, and customers base their behavior and decisions on. Some sociologists claim that our behavior is primarily determined by class ties, sub-cultural conditions, and the integration and control mechanisms that exist there. Published literature points to several critical challenges managers face in multicultural workplaces.

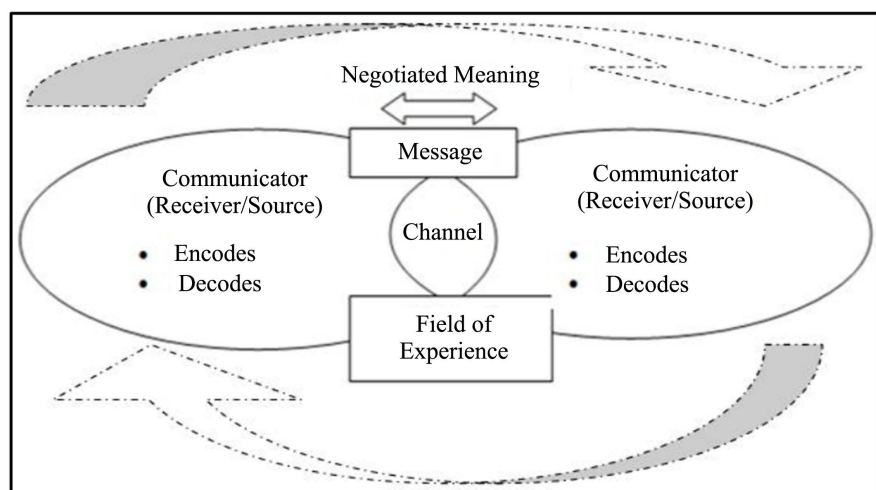


Figure 1. The communication process (Sulaiman, Hussin, & Amir, 2019: p. 82).

Awareness of cultural factors in communication is crucial for effective communication and building positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds. Different cultures have different ways of communicating, and understanding these differences is necessary for misunderstandings not to occur. For example, some cultures value indirect communication, while others value direct communication. Being aware of these differences can help avoid misunderstandings and promote clarity in communication. Being aware of cultural factors in communication can help us show respect for the cultural differences of others. Acknowledging and valuing these differences can build stronger relationships and avoid unintentionally causing offense or disrespect.

Effective communication is critical to building trust and relationships with others. By understanding cultural factors, we can communicate in a way that is appropriate and respectful, which can help to establish trust and promote positive relationships. Cultural differences can also include language barriers. By being aware of these barriers, we can find ways to communicate effectively and bridge these gaps. Understanding cultural factors in communication can help us appreciate and celebrate the diversity of our society. We can create a more inclusive and harmonious society by valuing and respecting different cultural perspectives which are the foundational building blocks of effectively managing and leading internationally.

3.2. Scandinavian Cultural Factors in Communication

Several cultural factors can affect communication in Scandinavian cultures, including egalitarianism, directness, non-confrontation, informality, and minimalism, to name a few. Scandinavian cultures are known for their strong emphasis on equality and social justice. This value is reflected in communication, where people tend to avoid hierarchical structures and address each other by their first names. This can also be seen in the use of inclusive language, where people often use terms such as “we” or “us” instead of “I” or “me.” Scandinavian communication is relatively direct and straightforward, with people expressing their thoughts and opinions openly. This can be attributed to the value of honesty and transparency in Scandinavian cultures and the belief that directness can help avoid misunderstandings and promote efficiency. While directness is valued in Scandinavian communication, people in these cultures also tend to avoid confrontation or conflict. This is partly due to the emphasis on social harmony and consensus-building and the belief that confrontation can be counterproductive and damaging to relationships.

Communication in Scandinavian cultures is often relatively informal, with people using casual language and avoiding overly formal or polite expressions. This can also be seen in humor and sarcasm, which is often used to lighten the mood or defuse tension in social situations. However, Scandinavian communication tends to be relatively minimalist, with people using simple, straightforward language and avoiding excessive or unnecessary details. This can be attributed to the belief that efficiency and clarity are essential in communication and

the value of respecting other people’s time and attention. Overall, these cultural factors can significantly impact communication in Scandinavian cultures, shaping the style and tone of communication and influencing how people interact with each other.

3.3. Communication in China vs. Scandinavia

Communication styles vary across cultural communities. Everything from body language and touch to voice and volume can have different interpretations when we speak (Smith, 2011). It can be challenging to know in advance how someone communicates based on their nationality, but we can use knowledge of variations in communication styles to explore specific situations. Poor communication often leads to conflicts, inefficiency, and a poor working environment. For example, while the Chinese can expect to adapt to formal authorities and sanctions (Zhao, 2008), people from Scandinavia may expect to have an equal voice and for all to be heard. The Chinese and Scandinavian communication styles differ significantly in several ways.

As seen in Figure 2, where the left diagram focuses on the high-context participants’ preferences when using government websites, Scandinavia has a lower-context culture. Similarly, on the right diagram, the focus is on the low-context participants’ cultural behavior within their society (Herselman & Greunen, 2011: p. 5). These results did not contradict the literature; Scandinavian countries are found to be of lower context. However, China and Japan are on top, having some of the most high-context cultures, meaning it is the opposite of Scandinavian culture.

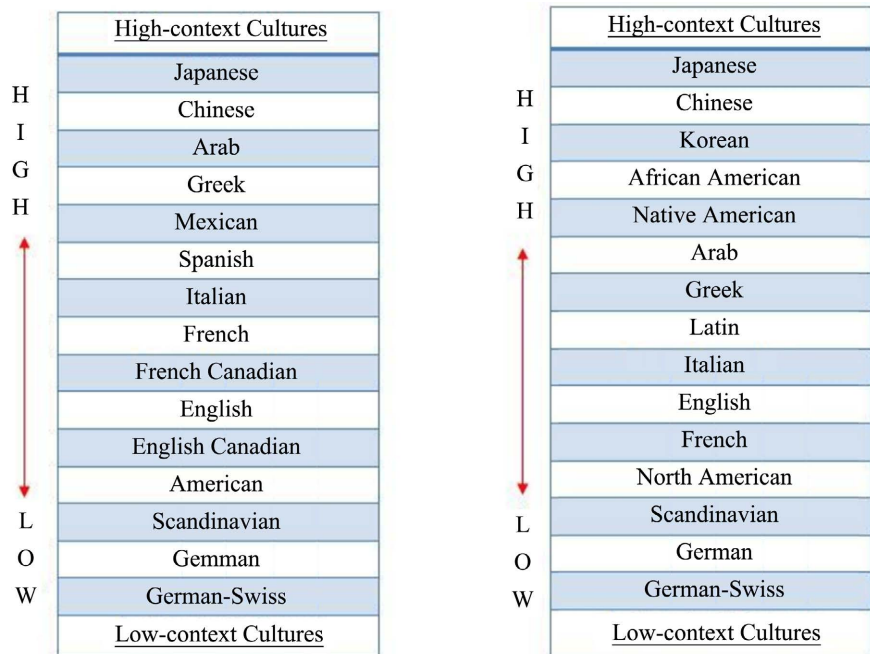


Figure 2. High- and low-context nationalities scale according to culture (Herselman & Greunen, 2011).

To pinpoint some differences, the Chinese communication style tends to be more direct, while the Scandinavian communication style is often more indirect. In China, people may be more likely to state their opinions and give feedback directly, while in Scandinavia, people may use more subtle cues and hints to convey their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, in China, there is, as mentioned, a strong emphasis on hierarchy and respect for authority figures. Communication often reflects this, with people addressing others by their title or position. In Scandinavia, there is a greater emphasis on equality, and people tend to communicate more informally and in a relaxed style. Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of communication in both Chinese and Scandinavian cultures, but the styles differ. In China, nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures may be more exaggerated and expressive, while in Scandinavia, nonverbal communication is often more subtle. In China, giving direct criticism is often considered impolite, so people may use more indirect ways to express their disapproval. In Scandinavia, however, direct criticism is often seen as a necessary part of communication, and people may be more straightforward in their feedback. The Chinese tend to have a more long-term time orientation, focusing on long-term goals and relationships. In contrast, Scandinavians tend to have a more short-term time orientation, prioritizing immediate results and efficiency.

While Chinese and Scandinavian communication styles value respect, trust, and harmony, they differ in their approach to directness, hierarchy, nonverbal communication, criticism, and time orientation. These two different communication styles show the importance of understanding cultural differences when communicating.

4. Indirect vs. Direct Communication

How indirect or direct we are can also be culturally conditioned. In high-context cultures, the style is often indirect because the context gives plenty of meaning to the message. Some countries with such high-context cultures are China, Korea, and Saudi Arabia (Stoian, 2020). On the other hand, in more Western cultures, such as in the United States or Scandinavia, which tend to be more low-context cultures, the meaning of the information lies in what is said, not in the context. A manager from the U.S. is generally more direct when communicating compared to a supervisor from East Asia (Stoian, 2020).

In **Figure 3**, the left panel depicts the Chinese network. It showcases the links between the hub (China) and its spokes (other countries); the right panel shows the links between six countries. Direct and indirect links influence the communication process. It can be more challenging when there are more indirect links; they act as noise in the communication process. In Japan, similarly to China, communication is often high context, which means that much of the meaning is conveyed through nonverbal cues, context, and indirect language. In this cultural context, saying “no” directly and explicitly can be considered rude and confrontational. Instead, the Japanese often use indirect language, such as saying, “it is difficult” or “let me think about it,” to convey a negative answer without

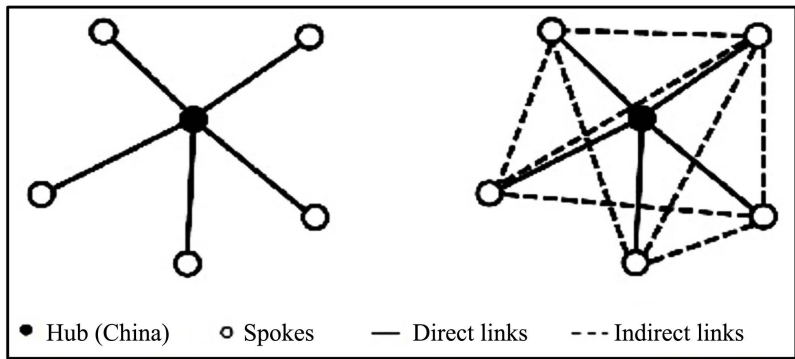


Figure 3. Direct and indirect links in a network of countries (Felbermayr, Jung, & Toubal, 2010).

explicitly saying “no.” This is because preserving harmony and avoiding conflict is highly valued in high-context cultures like Japan. Saying “no” directly can be seen as a direct challenge to another person’s position or request, damaging relationships and creating tension. By using indirect language, the Japanese can convey a negative answer while maintaining the relationship and respecting the other person’s feelings. Additionally, in high-context cultures like Japan, relationships and social hierarchies are also highly valued. Saying “no” directly can be seen as a challenge to authority or a lack of respect for a higher-ranking individual. By using indirect language, the Japanese can show respect for the other person’s position while still conveying their negative answer. In Japan’s high-context culture, saying “no” directly can be perceived as rude and confrontational. Indirect language allows the Japanese to preserve harmony and relationships while conveying a negative answer.

Scandinavian communication is generally known for being direct and straightforward rather than indirect. However, there are situations where indirectness may be used, particularly in social situations or when trying to avoid confrontation. One reason for indirectness in Scandinavian communication could be the desire to maintain social harmony and avoid conflict. In some situations, being too direct or confrontational may be seen as impolite or aggressive, potentially damaging relationships or social cohesion. As a result, people in Scandinavian cultures may use indirect language or non-verbal cues to convey their meaning more subtly or tactfully.

Another reason for indirectness in Scandinavian communication could be the desire to respect other people’s feelings or privacy. For example, in some situations where a person may be in a vulnerable position or dealing with a problematic issue, it may be seen as impolite or invasive to ask direct questions or press for details. In these situations, people in Scandinavian cultures may use indirect language or non-verbal cues to show support or concern while still respecting the other person’s boundaries. While directness is generally valued in Scandinavian communication, there may be situations where indirectness is used to maintain social harmony, respect other people’s feelings or privacy, or avoid confrontation.

5. Individualistic Societies

One can also see differences in how we highlight our personal identity based on a culture's focus on individualism. In communication, the use of "I" or egocentric language can vary between high-context and low-context cultures.

High-context cultures, such as those in Asia and the Middle East, tend to value group harmony and interdependence. These cultures often rely heavily on nonverbal cues, context, and indirect language (Mujtaba, 2022). In such cultures, using "I" or egocentric language can be seen as a sign of individualism and may be considered rude or inappropriate. Instead, people in high-context cultures tend to use more inclusive language that emphasizes the group or collective, such as "we" or "our." In contrast, low-context cultures, such as those in North America and Western Europe, tend to value individualism and self-expression. Communication in these cultures tends to be more direct and explicit, with people using "I" or egocentric language more frequently. In these cultures, using inclusive language, such as "we" or "our," may be seen as too vague or impersonal. The use of "I" or egocentric language can reflect the cultural values of a society (Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015). High-context cultures tend to prioritize group harmony and may view egocentric language as inappropriate. At the same time, low-context cultures tend to prioritize individualism and may view inclusive language as too impersonal. It is important to be aware of these cultural differences in communication to avoid misunderstandings and to promote effective communication across cultures.

Scandinavian societies are often considered to be collectivistic rather than individualistic. Collectivism is a cultural orientation that emphasizes the importance of group harmony and interdependence, whereas individualism emphasizes individual autonomy and personal achievement. In Scandinavian cultures, there is a strong emphasis on social welfare, equality, and consensus-building. People are often expected to contribute to the well-being of society, and there is a high level of trust in government and social institutions. These values reflect a collectivistic cultural orientation, where the group's interests are prioritized over individual ones. At the same time, Scandinavian cultures also value individual autonomy and personal freedom. For example, there is a high level of gender equality in Scandinavian societies, and people are generally free to express their opinions and beliefs openly. However, these values are balanced with the collectivistic values of social responsibility and consensus-building. There is a degree of individualism in Scandinavian cultures, and they are generally considered to be more collectivistic than individualistic. The emphasis on social welfare, equality, and consensus-building reflects a cultural orientation that prioritizes the group's well-being over individual interests.

6. The Impact of Worldviews

Worldviews are also an important part of the cultural context and are a factor that affects communication. They are comprehensive ideas about how the world

works, which influence how we understand phenomena in everyday life, for example, various religious ideas. Worldview affects what we mean, how we attribute meaning to other people's statements, and trust (Ibrahim, 1991). Having different worldviews can significantly affect communication because it shapes how individuals perceive and interpret messages and how they express themselves. Worldviews are shaped by factors such as culture, religion, personal experiences, and values and can vary significantly between individuals and groups. When communicating with individuals who hold different worldviews, misunderstandings can occur due to differences in interpretation and expression. For example, a person from a collectivist culture may prioritize group harmony and avoid conflict, while a person from an individualistic culture may prioritize personal expression and assertiveness. This can lead to misinterpreting messages and a mismatch of expectations between the communicators.

Moreover, different worldviews can lead to differences in beliefs and values, further impacting communication. For example, someone who values honesty and directness may find it challenging to communicate with someone who prioritizes saving face or avoiding conflict. Additionally, differences in religious beliefs or cultural practices can impact communication, such as when certain topics or behaviors are considered taboo or disrespectful.

As seen in **Figure 4**, one can divide worldviews into three different kinds: conceptual relationships among beliefs, values, and worldview statements (Koltko-Rivera, 2004: p. 5). The model divides worldviews into three types of beliefs. Existential beliefs are statements that describe entities that are believed to

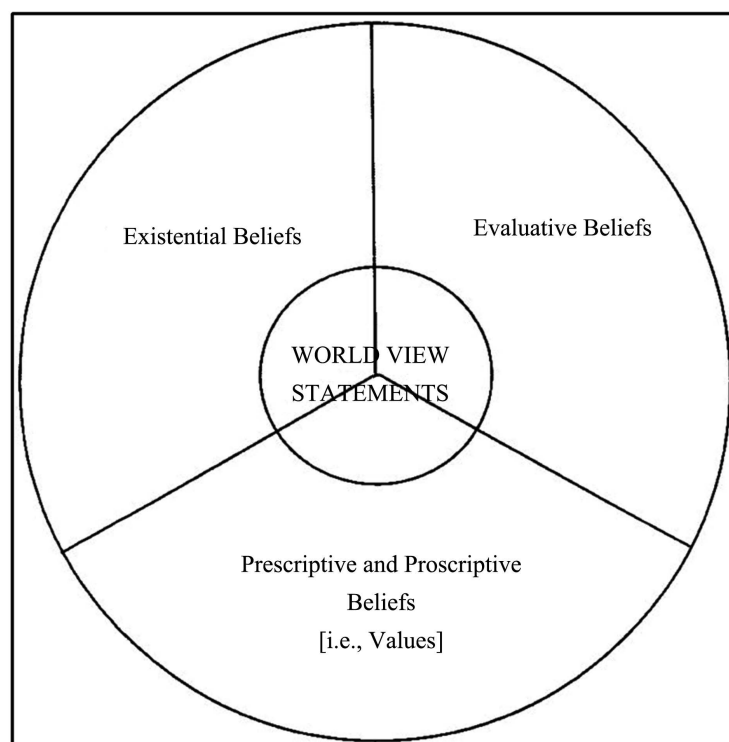


Figure 4. The three types of worldview statements (Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

exist in the world; the second form of belief, the evaluative, refers to assertions made about people or acts that are evaluated; lastly, worldview assertions, such as “The thing to do in life is to live in the moment,” are prescriptive or proscriptive (Rokeach, 1973: pp. 6-7). Worldviews involve ideals while also extending to other types of ideas. What way one views the world greatly impacts the way one communicates.

A Scandinavian worldview can impact the style of communication used in Scandinavian cultures. Scandinavian cultures are, as mentioned earlier, often characterized by a strong emphasis on equality, social harmony, and consensus-building. This worldview is shaped by the region’s history of democracy, social welfare, and egalitarian values. In communication this worldview is reflected in the Scandinavian style of communication, which is often characterized by directness, honesty, and an emphasis on mutual respect. Communication in Scandinavian cultures tends to be informal and egalitarian, with people addressing each other by their first names and avoiding titles or honorifics. The use of indirect language or euphemisms is also uncommon, as Scandinavians tend to value honesty and directness in communication. Moreover, the Scandinavian style of communication often emphasizes consensus-building and collaboration. This is reflected in decision-making processes, which tend to be participatory and democratic, emphasizing reaching a consensus and avoiding conflict. People in Scandinavian cultures also tend to be skilled at conflict resolution, using open communication and negotiation to find mutually beneficial solutions. The Scandinavian worldview and values shape the communication style used in Scandinavian cultures. Directness, honesty, and mutual respect are prioritized, and collaboration and consensus-building are emphasized. Understanding the values and worldviews of Scandinavian cultures is vital for effective communication, diversity management, and teamwork with people from this region and others around the world (Blanchard, 2021; Burke, 2006; Cavico & Mujtaba, 2021; Dahlin, Weingart, & Hinds, 2005; Douglas & Sutton, 2023; Grenness, 2003; Gratani, Sutton, Butler, Bohensky, Foale, & Stevenson, 2016; Hilson, 2008; Mujtaba, 2014; Olwig, 2013; Rothstein & Stolle, 2003; Syed & Ozbilgin, 2015; Torppa, 2010; Warner-Söderholm, 2012; Mujtaba, Chinta, & Seyoum, 2020).

Recognizing and respecting different worldviews is important to minimize misunderstandings and promote effective communication. This involves developing cultural competency and being aware of cultural differences in values, beliefs, and communication styles (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2016). By doing so, individuals can better understand and appreciate different perspectives and communicate in ways that are respectful and effective across cultures.

6.1. Religion as a Part of Cultural Diversity

One area of conflict that has been widely discussed is religious symbols and expressions or religiously based behavior. This applies not only in the public sphere but also in the countries’ labor markets. Freedom of religion and belief includes, among other things, the right to communicate one’s religious beliefs. The core of

freedom of religion and outlook on life can be expressed as the individual’s right to have the faith or perspective on life they want and to practice it freely, alone or with others. In the United States of America, **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibits harassment on the grounds of religion and requires the employer to work actively, purposefully, and systematically to avoid it (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2020). It states, “Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin” The Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Pub. L. 102-166).

Religion has significantly impacted Scandinavian culture, particularly in the past, but its influence has decreased in recent years. The earliest religions in Scandinavia were paganism and mythology, with beliefs in gods and goddesses such as Odin, Thor, and Freya. These beliefs were integral to Scandinavian culture and shaped how people lived, with rituals and practices centered around these deities. However, with the arrival of Christianity in the region in the Middle Ages, the dominant religion shifted to Christianity, and over time, the old pagan beliefs were largely abandoned. Christianity significantly impacted Scandinavian culture and society with the establishment of churches, monasteries, and religious institutions. The Christian faith brought new values and beliefs, including the importance of forgiveness, charity, and humility, which have had a lasting impact on Scandinavian culture.

As showcased in **Figure 5**, those who follow certain religions tend to look for

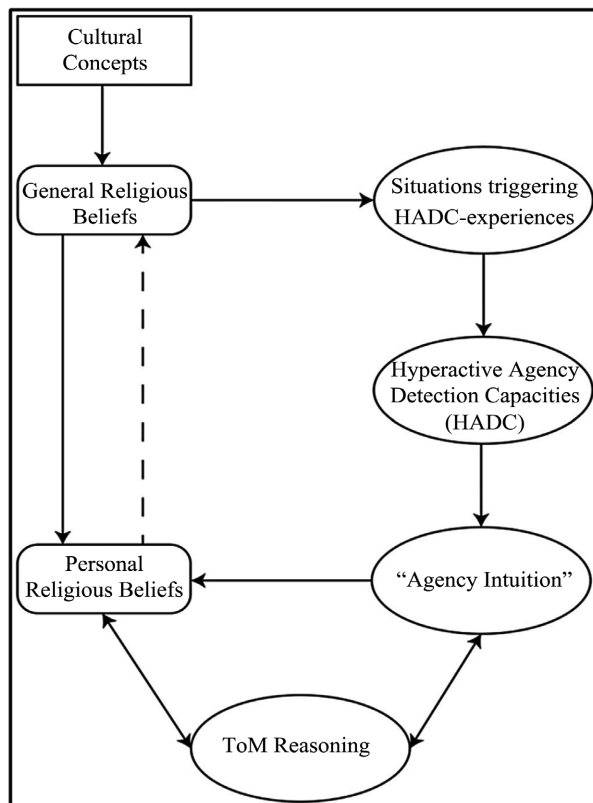


Figure 5. Graphical representation of the interactive religious experience Model (IREM) (Van Leeuwen & Elk, 2018).

circumstances that will set off their hyperactive agency detection capacities (HADC). Similar representations would show analogous linkages for various socio-cognitive biases. The graphic highlights the pertinent relationships for examples of personal belief formation in which agency intuitions are at work. This goes to show how religion can impact the communication process. However, religion has become less influential in Scandinavian culture in recent years, with many people identifying as atheists or agnostics. This shift has been reflected in changes to social and cultural norms, with more emphasis on secularism, individualism, and progressive social policies. Religion has significantly impacted Scandinavian culture throughout history, and its influence has diminished in recent years as the region has become more secular and individualistic. Nonetheless, the cultural heritage and traditions associated with the Scandinavian religion continue to be an important part of the region's identity and history.

Scandinavian societies have been successful in reducing discrimination based on religion for several reasons. First, the Nordic model of social democracy, which prioritizes social welfare and equality, has played a significant role in reducing discrimination. By ensuring that all members of society have access to basic human needs and services, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, Scandinavian societies have reduced inequality and promoted social cohesion. Second, Scandinavian societies have a strong tradition of human rights and tolerance, which has helped to create an inclusionary environment that is more accepting of diversity. This tolerance is reflected in laws that protect individual rights and social norms that promote respect for different cultures and religions. Third, Scandinavian societies have a high level of education and literacy, which has helped to promote critical thinking and a greater understanding of different cultures and religions. This has helped to reduce stereotypes and misconceptions and has contributed to a more open and inclusive society. Finally, the relatively homogenous population of Scandinavia has also played a role in reducing discrimination based on religion. With a small number of minority religious groups, there is less opportunity for discrimination to occur and a greater sense of shared identity and culture among the population. The combination of social welfare policies, human rights, tolerance, education, and literacy, and a relatively homogenous population has helped create an environment where discrimination based on religion is less prevalent in Scandinavian societies.

6.2. Interaction between Factors

Social factors influence communication, such as identity, roles, class, norms, and values; these can also vary across cultural contexts. The interaction between these factors can be very complex. In some cases, social status or class will be what characterizes communication most, while in other cases, gender will be what is most prominent.

One key social factor affecting communication is social status or power. People with higher social status or power are given more respect and attention in

many societies, and their opinions and perspectives are often valued more highly. This can impact communication by leading to unequal exchanges, with those in lower social status or power feeling less able to express themselves or challenge the views of those in positions of authority.

Cultural norms and values are also important social factors that influence communication. Different cultures may have different expectations for how communication should take place, such as whether it should be direct or indirect, involve a lot of nonverbal cues, or prioritize individual or collective goals. These differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts when people from different cultures interact.

Gender is another social factor that can affect communication. In many societies, gender roles and expectations can influence how men and women communicate, with men being socialized to be more assertive and dominant and women being socialized to be more accommodating and nurturing. This can lead to gender-based differences in communication styles, with men more likely to interrupt or dominate conversations and women more likely to use indirect language and avoid confrontation. Finally, social relationships and contexts are also important factors that affect communication. The nature of the relationship between communicators and the social context in which communication takes place can impact how messages are perceived and interpreted. For example, communication between friends may be more casual and informal than communication between a boss and an employee, and communication in a public setting may be more formal and constrained than communication in a private setting. Social factors play a critical role in shaping communication, and understanding these factors is essential for effective and respectful communication across diverse social contexts.

Scandinavian social factors have a significant impact on communication styles in the region. One crucial social factor is the emphasis on equality and consensus-building, which is reflected in communication practices. In Scandinavian societies, there is a strong emphasis on treating everyone with respect and avoiding any behavior that could be seen as confrontational or hierarchical. This leads to an often-indirect communication style, with speakers using polite and euphemistic language to convey their message rather than being direct and assertive. Another important social factor in Scandinavian communication is the emphasis on collectivism and social responsibility. This can be seen in how Scandinavian societies prioritize the needs of the group over the needs of the individual. In communication, this emphasis on collectivism means that speakers are often focused on building consensus and finding solutions that benefit the group rather than promoting individual interests or achievements.

The use of nonverbal cues also reflects the emphasis on social equality and collectivism in Scandinavian communication. Eye contact, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues signal respect and attention to the speaker and build rapport and understanding between communicators. Additionally, Scandinavians tend to avoid interrupting others and may frequently pause during a conversa-

tion to show that they are listening and considering the other person's perspective. Overall, the social factors of equality, collectivism, and social responsibility emphasized in Scandinavian societies significantly impact communication styles in the region. This leads to a communication style that is often indirect, focused on consensus-building, and reliant on nonverbal cues to convey respect and understanding.

Cross-cultural communication is a vital aspect of global business, and it requires a thorough understanding of cultural differences to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds. Sometimes, specific policies can help employees effectively communicate face-to-face and digitally through social media platforms (Bowen & Pennaforte, 2017) with customers, suppliers, and vendors (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2023). The Scandinavian region is culturally unique and requires particular attention regarding cross-cultural communication. Suggestions for effective communication with Scandinavians include understanding their cultural norms, values, and beliefs, such as their preference for equality and consensus in decision-making. Comparing Scandinavian culture to others, such as Japan and the United States, it is evident that culture varies and affects the communication process, proving that it is crucial to have intercultural communication skills. Additionally, learning some basic phrases in their language, such as hello and thank you, can demonstrate respect and help establish a positive rapport. In summary, effective cross-cultural communication with Scandinavians requires a deep understanding of their culture, values, and beliefs, which can ultimately lead to successful business relationships.

7. Summary

Cultural diversity means having various elements of people from different backgrounds and ethnicities. Diversity is the right to see other people for whom they are without prejudging or illegally discriminating. To recognize diversity is to value it as a contribution to a better and more prosperous society. To respect diversity is to see others as equal to oneself, with equal rights (Ranaivoson, 2007). While there are numerous important factors that make a person different from others, one dimension of diversity is cultural differences. There are several benefits to understanding and studying diverse cultures. Studying other cultures can help individuals develop empathy and understanding toward people from different backgrounds. This can help reduce stereotypes and prejudices and lead to more positive relationships and interactions between people from different cultures. Understanding other cultures can help individuals become more aware of cultural differences and develop cultural sensitivity. This can lead to more effective communication and collaboration with people from different backgrounds.

Cross-cultural learning enhances personal growth and development: Learning about other cultures can help individuals expand their knowledge, broaden their perspective, and challenge their assumptions and beliefs. This can lead to personal growth and development and help individuals become more open-minded

and adaptable, which are especially important when professionals work for multinational corporations or as expatriates. Understanding other cultures is essential for business and establishing relationships in the global marketplace. Awareness of cultural differences and customs can help individuals navigate cultural nuances and avoid misunderstandings, which can be crucial for building successful relationships and partnerships. Studying other cultures can help preserve and celebrate cultural diversity, which is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society. By valuing and respecting different cultures, individuals can help promote cultural heritage and preserve important cultural practices and traditions. Understanding and studying other cultures is essential for promoting empathy, cultural awareness, personal growth, business, and international relations, and preserving cultural diversity. It can lead to more positive relationships and interactions between people from different backgrounds and help create a more inclusive and equitable society. One can see the prominent role culture plays in communicating, in researching and understanding the Scandinavian style of communication.

Overall, the Scandinavian culture significantly impacts their communication style, which is often indirect, egalitarian, and consensus oriented. The cultural values of social equality and collectivism, along with the emphasis on building consensus, lead to a communication style that prioritizes cooperation, harmony, and conflict avoidance. Additionally, indirect language, such as understatement and implicit communication, is prevalent in the Scandinavian culture and reflects a desire to avoid offending others and maintain social harmony. Understanding these cultural factors is crucial for effective communication with Scandinavians, as it can help avoid misunderstandings and foster positive relationships.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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