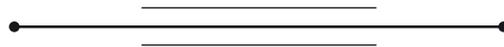


Response Able

Where is the Cultural Richness
in
Finnish Silence and Autonomy?



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Response Able

Able to respond in an appropriate way for self and others

The Author's Experience & Acknowledgements

I came to Finland as a Fulbright Professor in 1975 and remained as a Senior Lecture of English and Intercultural Communication as well as a Docent of History and Intercultural Relations at three Finnish universities. My research related to Finnish identity brings the richness of Finnish history and culture together in publications like *American Foreign Policy and the Finnish Exception* (1987) with a focus on the positive sides of Finnish diplomacy and *That's Not Me. Learning to Cope with Sensitive Cultural Issues* (2009) with a focus on the challenges of communicating Finnish cultural richness to others. During more than three decades, I slowly became aware of the depth of Finnish *hiljaisuus* (silence) and *autonomia* (autonomy). The Turku School of Economics, which is now part of the University of Turku, offered the point of departure for my learning experience.

On Finnish side I thank Christopher Evatt who created *Response Able* to be a substitute for the word responsibility and Pekka Pirhonen who introduced the concept during a No Agenda Club meeting for business people and consultants. I also appreciate my learning from colleagues at the No Agenda meetings. Participating in these discussions and learning from Finnish and exchange students in my intercultural communication and management courses gave an opportunity to better understand Finnish culture. On the American side I have benefited from pedagogical and theoretical collaboration with Donal Carbaugh who created a basis for my ethnographic learning experience in Finland.

Introduction

This article will begin with a question for Finns and others. If you are a Finn, how often has it been easy to explain the positive meanings of *hiljaisuus* (silence) and *autonomia* (autonomy) to others? If you are not a Finn, has it been easy for you to understand the positive sides of Finnish silence and autonomy? When the cultural richness of Finnish silence and autonomy are taken for granted by Finns and invisible, at least initially, for others, these questions are rarely asked and discussed.

This article will focus on shared cultural norms as well as different interpretations of Finnish silence and employee's autonomy. Nevertheless, all the examples can also be modified for discussion about everyday ways of communicating and integrating social relationships. I will briefly introduce my interpretation of 'cultural richness', 'culture', and 'response able'. *Cultural richness* is understood in this article to mean *cultural presence that works in a positive social way*. *Culture* means many things to different people. In this article culture is understood to be a combination of (1) visible social diversity, e.g. personalities, regional subcultures, religion and social contexts, and (2) often invisible, taken-for-granted, shared frames of reference throughout the society, which are implicitly attached to familiar terms or other means of communication, e.g., *the linkage between the local language and the take-for-granted local social practices*.

The concept of culture is limited here to that which is deeply felt and resonates among people with shared frames of reference for *cohering (joining together) diversity* within the same cultural landscape. Here, I would like to make explicit that the word 'diversity' is also important when discussing what is rather common within a culture. Therefore, all the examples in this article are only here to provide a basis for discussion. During the discussions every example can be interpreted differently in different contexts by individuals with different expectations, e.g. personal, professional, that are often taken for granted.

A *response able* balance between 'responsibility' and 'opportunity' can open the door to being able to respond to different situations in ways that are appropriate for self and others. When a person becomes aware of and can explain the 'how' and 'why' of his/her behavior to others, s/he is *'response able' with 'communication tools' for responding in an appropriate/reasonable way for self and others in one's local social and/or intercultural contexts*. Being 'response able' is also

connected to helping others become aware of and begin to explain their taken-for-granted cultural richness.

Rational discussion about the ways Finnish communication and leadership norms can reinforce each other in positive and risky ways opens the door to communicating often invisible positive meanings of Finnish silence and autonomy to others. Here I will briefly introduce that reference to 'negative' can carry different meanings in this article. For example, a manager can be in a negative mood when for some reason s/he 'doesn't care'. This situation can lead to a negative feeling by the subordinate. In contrast, the manager might have too much respect for the autonomy of the subordinate. This respect, with a positive attitude towards the subordinate, can sometimes be 'karhunpalvelus' (counterproductive) which leads to a negative 's/he 'doesn't care' interpretation by the subordinate who feels disconnected. Therefore, that which is risky when related to communication and leadership can lead to a negative interpretation on one side or the other.

The examples in this article have an integrated goal: creation of '*Dialogue tools*' for discussions that can lead to better relationships within a Finnish organization and also across cultures. The first part of the article will focus on examples within Finland and the second part on international comparisons. All the examples of Dialogue tools in this article were created during intercultural discussions with business students, managers, and consultants within and outside the Turku School of Economics.

We will first focus on the importance of creating a Shared Third Space; second, on ways to interpret and communicate the often invisible positive cultural meaning of silence and autonomy; third, on Finnish communication and leadership norms related to silence and autonomy; fourth, on a model for discussion related to how and why communication and leadership norms influence each other in positive and risky ways; and fifth, on an intercultural comparison related to the model.

Creation of a Shared Third Space

A Shared Third Space is a semi-coherent social learning space, inhabited by people in transformation who are creating shared frames of reference in order to explore the diversity and commonality of their taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and others. The diversity can be active, e.g., from personal, professional, and sub-cultural perspectives in different contexts. As the 'parts' of their communication begin to fit together more 'logically', this transformation process can lead to both new

and improved relationships within a local and/or an international organization.

The transformation comes as leaders and subordinates become learner-teachers of each other during meaningful group discussions about 'how' and 'why' communication and leadership norms reinforce each other in useful and ineffective ways within and across cultures. As Finns create 'Dialogue tools' for building better relationships within a Finnish organization, they will also be more aware of how to explain Finnish cultural richness to others in intercultural contexts.

Part I Examples within Finland

Misinterpreted Finnish Culture

Deep cultural meanings can often be hidden from both 'insiders' when it is taken for granted and from 'outsiders' when it is invisible to them.

How does this relate to the cultural richness of Finnish silence and autonomy? This combination of Finnish uniqueness faces two challenges: 'outsiders' (e.g. other Europeans and North Americans) are often confused about Finnish silence and autonomy when they arrive in Finland, and 'insiders' (Finns) rarely explain the 'why we do it this way' related to *hiljaisuus* and *autonomia*.

It is rather common for Finns to agree with 'outsiders' that Finns are 'silent' and 'shy' when using English. Even though dictionaries are very important tools for all of us, foreign language dictionary definitions and/or translations, e.g. 'silent' and 'shy', rarely communicate the positive sides of Finnish *silence* to others. Yes, there is negative Finnish silence, as in other cultures, but dictionaries rarely, if ever, give examples of positive active silence and positive relaxing silence. (More information about positive silence below and also in Appendix 1.)

Open group discussions can create multiple examples of work life and create new tools for becoming aware of and explaining Finnish cultural richness to others as well as tools for encouraging others to explain the logic of their cultural norms. When creating and using new tools for communicating the deep meanings of Finnish silence and autonomy, everyone can benefit from asking and discussing three basic questions:

- (1) What *expectations* in me make it difficult to understand the other's ways of communicating and acting;
- (2) what is there in the logic of the other's ways of communicating and acting that are hidden from me;
- and (3) how can we help each other ask

and answer these kinds of questions when using one's local native language and/or a shared international language with others? These questions are useful for better understanding self and others as personal and cultural beings.

Asking and answering these questions is a bit like coping with a local and intercultural *puzzle* in which communication and leadership norms can reinforce each other in positive and risky, counterproductive ways within and across cultures. It is also challenging to put the puzzle together when *risk words* (so-called 'correct' words) carry different meanings within and across cultures.

A *false friend/risk word* is an exact same word with implicitly embedded meanings that are readily familiar in one's local social environment. They are attached deeply, e.g. to personal, professional and/or cultural systems of coherence, yet are being understood by others to send different messages. The English words 'silence' and 'autonomy' are two of many misleading 'risk words' that often hide the positive meanings of *hiljaisuus* (silence) and *autonomia* (autonomy). A puzzle is a challenge full of confusion which creates opportunity to become aware of, create and use meaningful communication tools.

Positive Active Finnish Silence

There is a clear consensus among many Finns that everyone could benefit from developing some more 'small talk' competence, and some Finns with different personal and/or regional backgrounds don't always feel comfortable with the silence of other Finns in some social contexts. They might prefer more verbal interaction than others in those situations *while being unaware of their own taken-for-granted comfort with silence in other contexts*.

Here is one example: a Finnish business student tells the European and American exchange students in his multicultural group that 'silence' carries a negative meaning in Finland. European and American exchange students agree even if the other Finns in the group disagree. After a couple of classes, all agree that silence is negative and talking is positive. At that point, I asked the Finnish student to describe a '*harkitsevainen*' Finn. Summary of his response: a *harkitsevainen* person listens and thinks while others are talking but also talks when it is one's turn to talk and feels that s/he has something meaningful to share with others.

I then asked if an '*ujo*' (shy) person could be '*harkitsevainen*'. The student replied 'yes but not always' and emphasized why he had ignored his taken-for-granted respect for being *harkitsevainen* in Finnish communication situations: he wanted Finns to be more

talkative and had thus been trapped by a 'too silent/too shy' negative semantic frame of reference during previous group discussions. The exchange students then realized that he is a *harkitsevainen* person, even if he was the Finn who talked the most in the group.

When reading this article, you might think of a Finn who has fallen into the same trap. Reference to Finns being silent, especially with an explicit or implicit focus on negative silence, is like using a tool that builds a negative image of *hiljaisuus* while hiding the positive sides of *hiljaisuus*. Reference to positive 'active silence' related to "listening, respecting, thinking, politely waiting for one's turn to talk, etc." is like using a tool to remodel the misinterpretation of silence in the minds of others. For more in-depth examples of multiple meanings of Finnish silence, go to Appendix 1.

Finnish Communication Norms

Communication norms are social norms related to acceptable and expected ways of communicating. Fulbright professor Donal Carbaugh introduced the concept of communication norms in the early 1990s. The Finnish examples in this article were then created and modified by over a thousand Finnish business students and business people in both Finnish and English during the past two decades. Anyone from another culture can use the approach in this article for reflection about the positive/useful and counterproductive sides of their cultural and subcultural communication norms.

The communication norms below can be interpreted to be taken-for-granted *communication tools* that many Finns use in different ways in different contexts, e.g., sometimes consistently and sometimes flexibly. Discussions over the years have also demonstrated how personality, regional differences and social contexts influence interpretation and the use of the norms.

The communication tool metaphor can open the door for discussion about modified ways for using the tools (norms) to minimize the risky sides and maximize the positive sides of Finnish communication norms in different contexts within Finland as well as in intercultural contexts. Here are some questions to ask self and others related to the communication norms below: "how do I use these tools in different contexts"; "how do I want others to use these tools"; and "how often do I take these tools for granted?"

When companies create space and time for group discussions about Finnish communication norms, multiple comments about what is 'useful' and 'not useful' will come to the surface, e.g., "the quality of the tool is interpreted by how we use it and expect others to use

it"; "for me, there is more trust at work when flexibly using tool #? and #?, and there are problems when tool #? isn't used"; "tool #? doesn't work without tool #?"; "I hate the way tool #? is often used in Finland, but I often miss the way that tool is used when I'm abroad for more than a week," etc.

Eight Finnish communication tools/norms created by more than a thousand Finnish business people and students are introduced below.

(1) When in public one should not be contentious. It is inappropriate to mention a topic that will arouse conflict unless one has very good arguments, it is very important and impersonal.

Julkisuudessa ei saisi haastaa riitaa. Ei ole sopivaa mainita aihetta, josta seuraa konflikti, ellei aihe ole tärkeä, hyvin perusteltu ja persoonaton.

Here, I will give one example of a positive and negative interpretation of tool #1. Some say "it is very important to use the tool because we don't respect a person who creates conflict based on personal preferences rather than very good arguments." During the discussion another person might say: "we use this tool too often in a way that prevents us from raising questions about issues that we should really discuss rationally." Both often then agree: "this tool is important but we need to use it differently in different contexts."

These two interpretations of communication tool #1 illustrate how communication norms can have positive (useful) and risky (counterproductive) sides related to the context and interpretation of the communication norms. This is the case in all cultures. Hopefully, these examples of two interpretations will lead to more discussion about tool #1 and the seven overlapping tools below.

(2) One should not discuss the obvious.

Itsestänselvyyksistä keskusteleminen on turhaa.

(3) One should speak about things that are relevant for others.

Puhutaan sellaista, joka on toisille relevanttia.

(4) In social situations one should observe, listen and think before speaking.

Sosiaalisissa tilanteissa pitäisi havainnoida, kuunnella ja ajatella ennen puhumista.

(5) One should be committed to what one says. You are known to be who you are by what you say. Promise and act accordingly without using the word 'promise'.

Puhumaansa täytyy sitoutua, tarkoittaa mitä sanoo ja seisoa sanojensa takana. 'Puheestaan ihminen tunnetaan'.

(6) What one says becomes the basis for subsequent relations. People should listen carefully and formulate what they say with care.

Myöhempi kanssakäyminen perustuu siihen, mitä on sanottu. Kuuntelijoiden pitäisi kuunnella tarkasti ja valita omat sanansa huolellisesti.

(7) Arguments based on facts are convincing and believable. Arguments showing personal feelings have little influence, especially when important decisions are being made.

Asiaperustelut ovat vakuuttavia/uskottavia. Tunneperusteluilla on vain vähän vaikutusta etenkin tärkeistä asioista päätettäessä.

(8) Modesty brings respect. One should not actively draw attention to one's competence and achievements without being requested to do so. Somebody else can bring them up and then it is all right to talk about them. (The Finnish Brand Mission is encouraging modification of this norm to promote the Finnish image abroad.)

Vaatimattomuus kaunistaa. Omista saavutuksista ei pitäisi puhua oma-aloitteisesti. Toinen voi tuoda ne esiin ja silloin niistä voi kertoa.

Here are perhaps the most important questions to ask during and after discussions: *"How often have I shared real life examples of how we use and misuse our communication tools in different Finnish contexts?"; "How can we Finns learn from each other about better ways to use communication tools?"; and "How can I explain to others how useful these tools can be in different Finnish contexts while also acknowledging the risky sides of the ways these tools are used in different contexts in Finnish culture?"* All these questions are related to becoming more 'response able' – not only on the Finnish side. They can also open the door for others to ask similar questions related to their communication norms.

Leadership norms

Leadership norms related to employee's autonomy were created by over a thousand Finnish students, managers and consultants. Autonomy tends to be taken for granted in many Finnish companies. Once assigned a task, the subordinates often become 'self-bossed', have individual responsibility for quality work, and contact the manager mainly when a problem arises. Such a participative managerial hierarchy with a 'bottom up' dimension supports autonomous development and allows Finns to create a vision for the future shared by all when it is effectively coordinated from above.

This means that the manager is responsible for the final decision but the subordinate is given autonomous space to figure things out. Subordinates have their own responsibility to approach the manager when there is a problem. This unique tradition has contributed in many instances to Finnish creativity. Compared with other cultures, one rarely hears Finns talk about the need for more autonomy.

Communication & Leadership Reality

Here is an open question for discussion: can Finnish private and public organizations benefit from more interaction leadership up and down between the manager and subordinates as well as horizontally among subordinates?

As in all cultures, Finnish communication and leadership norms reinforce each other in different ways. I will start with the concept of **Positive Active Silence**. This silence is *Useful Silence* when the manager is silent but the mind is active in an appropriate way, e.g., *when listening attentively, being focused on something, showing interest, being in one's own thoughts while thinking about ways to support and learn from subordinates, respecting and giving private space to others, etc.* This is like a person using his/her open eyes and ears in a useful way before using his/her tongue. The 'eyes, ears, tongues' metaphor is on the back cover.

This positive active silence is the basis for **Positive Useful Talk** when using Finnish communication tools flexibly, e.g., taking a few steps, but only a few, towards the ways that Americans use their communication tools. These steps can lead a Finn towards talking in an appropriate way from a Finnish perspective, e.g., *checking to see if the obvious is really obvious or the irrelevant is really irrelevant, informing others, giving enough feedback, talking after observing/thinking, asking questions, encouraging subordinates to raise questions, not verbalizing/checking up too often, standing behind one's words,* This is like a person using his/her tongue in a useful way after using his/her eyes and ears in a useful way.

Positive Useful Talk leads to a positive interpretation of leadership talk among 'self-bossed' subordinates. Therefore, the cultural richness in Finnish silence and autonomy is active when positive active silence becomes the basis for positive talk. **Here, we have arrived at an example of Finnish cultural richness related to being 'response able'.**

In contrast, 'self-bossed' subordinates can also experience a negative interpretation of **Risk Silence**. For example, the silence is not well-organized from a subordinate's perspective if (1) the manager is silent and the mind is active in an unsuitable way, e.g., *being disconnected, giving too much silent respect for autonomy, thinking that something is obvious or irrelevant when it isn't, too busy while focused on other things, etc.*, or (2) when the manager is silent and the mind is passive/inactive in an inappropriate way, e.g., *unaware of the need for more interaction and support for subordinates, not noticing the situation, etc.* This is like a situation in which his/her eyes and ears are not

functioning for different reasons, all of which limit important interaction with subordinates.

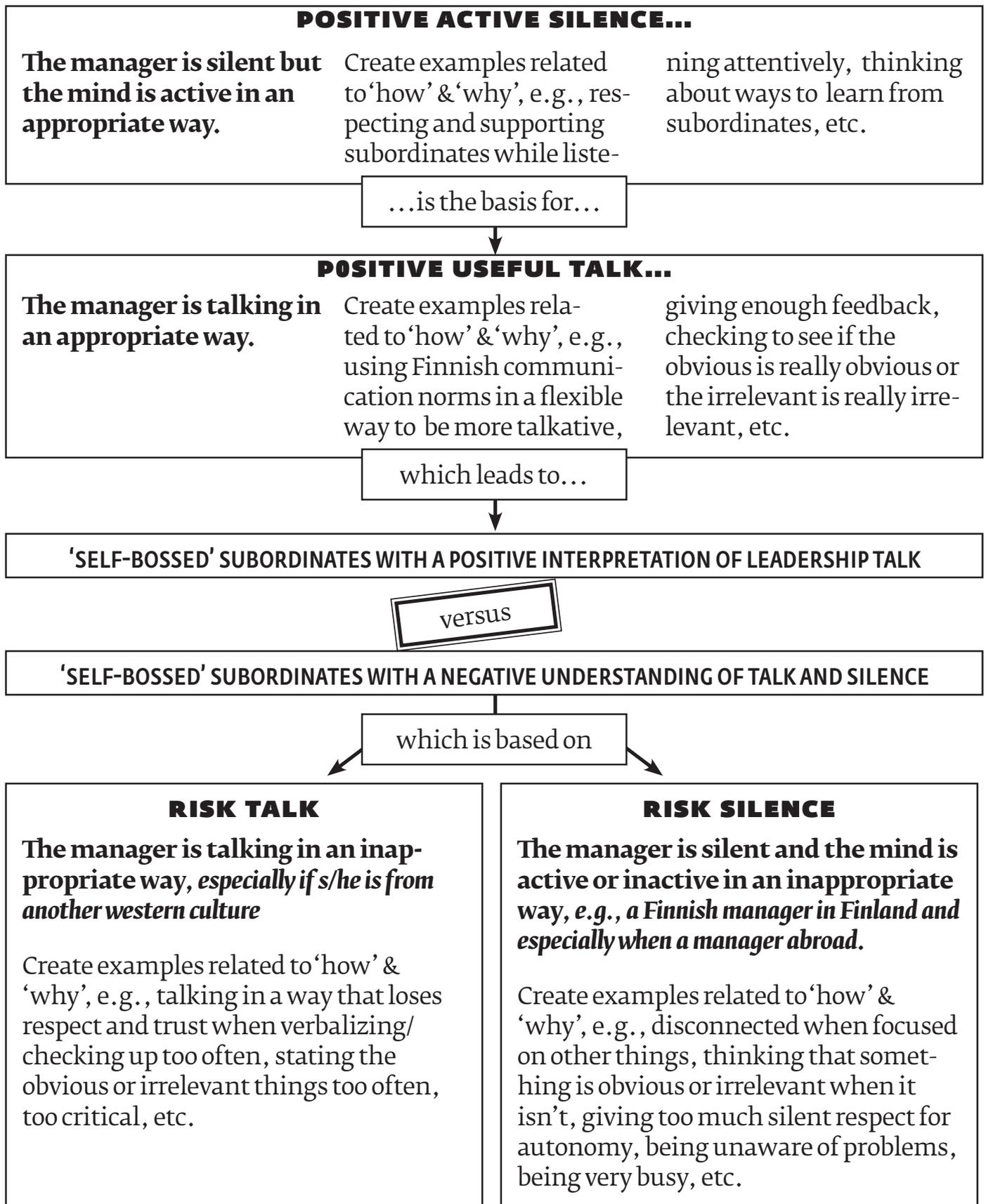
A negative interpretation of **Risk Talk** can come when the manager is using Finnish communication norms (tools) 'too flexibly', e.g., from a Finnish perspective, like American managers: *verbalizing/checking up too often, not listening enough when talking, stating the obvious or irrelevant things too often, not standing behind one's words, too critical, etc.* This is like a Finn or non-Finn using his/her tongue in a 'risky' way in a Finnish context.

The model on the next page sums up aspects of Finnish reality that can benefit from more discussion among Finns and across cultures. We now have a combination of *risk words* like silence and *risk action* related to different ways eyes, ears and tongues are used. Within Finland group discussions can lead to more interactive creativity and also development of competence to explain Finnish reality to others.

The first step is always creation of self awareness; the second step is developing competence to explain one's cultural ways to others; and the third step is to help others go through the same process. Discussion about these three steps is the goal of this model. Hopefully, international organizations will create multiple modified examples of the model for all the cultures they are working with.

When 'response able' to communicate the 'how' and 'why' of what is often considered appropriate or inappropriate in one's own culture, others will become aware of what is positive, *perhaps for the first time*. When people from different cultures give examples of how their communication and leadership norms reinforce each other in positive and risky ways, they can better understand each other's cultural 'logic'. This kind of discussion often brings awareness of 'useful silence', 'useful talk', 'risk silence', 'risk talk' and 'risk action' within and across cultures.

Finnish Example Of Leadership And Communication Norms Reinforcing Each Other



This model can be used in modified ways for discussion about communication among subordinates, e.g. team members, by replacing reference to 'the manager' with 'a subordinate'. Sometimes the problem is the absence of positive silence leading to positive talk from the bottom up or among subordinates.

Challenge and opportunity within and across culture

There are two important points to consider when communicating within or across cultures: (1) we can benefit from learning about both the personal and the cultural history behind the speech, silence, action and texts of others, e.g. their expectations based on personal, professional and/or local social experience that are often implicitly influencing their interpretations, and (2) we can benefit from becoming aware of the personal and social/cultural history influencing our own expectations of others within and across cultures, which can contribute to misinterpretation of the speech, silence and actions of others.

The social context and knowledge flow influence interaction within an organization. How do we use our taken-for-granted social tools related to communication and leadership norms within an organization? Once we begin to discuss this question, more awareness of what is useful and missing related to knowledge flow will open the door for using tools to build sustainable knowledge flow within and across cultures.

A Finnish challenge and opportunity

Our intentions can be more or less clear to us but unawareness of 'risk words' can be counterproductive for human relations within and across cultures. Every word can be a 'risk word' depending on the context and the often implicit expectations of the interactors. The risk increases in intercultural contexts, e.g., when translating *hiljaisuus/hiljainen* into silence/silent to describe Finns and *autonomia* into autonomy. This misunderstanding is not limited, however, to intercultural contexts when we also refer to three additional risk words: 'obvious', 'promise' and 'trust'.

Leadership and communication norms can create misleading expectations related to 'not discussing the obvious' (tool #2) and 'making a promise without using the word promise' (tool #5). 'Obvious' and 'promise' are related to 'trust'. In the Finnish context, making more reference to what *might not be obvious* can come via flexible use of communication norms when moving from positive active silence to positive useful talk. When both sides are more aware of what is really obvious via more open communication, there is more trust in the atmosphere.

Here are three examples from business people: "sometimes I am so busy that I need to be reminded about the obvious"; "do I really know what is obvious to others?"; and "our misinterpretation of each other became obvious to me when we trusted each other to openly refer to something that might be obvious."

Nevertheless, even Finnish business students of the so-called new cultural generation might sometimes explain how they sometimes feel offended when told what was already obvious for them, and they don't want to risk insulting others. Therefore, a *few* steps towards more double checking about what might be obvious can support movement from Finnish positive silence to positive talk in a Finnish context. In contrast, too many steps in that direction, e.g. communicating and acting like an American manager, can lead to risky talk interpreted, from a Finnish perspective, as denial of respect for autonomy.

Trust can grow with the movement from positive silence to positive talk but trust can be on a tightrope when there is a combination of (1) misusing tool # 5 - not standing behind one's words, (2) misusing tools # 2 & 3 - avoiding reference to the so-called obvious and relevant, (3) giving too much respect for autonomy to the subordinate, and/or (4) being too busy to interact with subordinates. This tightrope challenge also exists among subordinates.

This brings us to a relationship between the model and a tool to modify communication norms. During a group discussion at a Finnish company, it became clear that the Finnish communication norms were being followed rather strictly. I asked if anyone understood the meaning of BS in English. There was a moment of silence followed by some laughter. I then suggested that a "Bull S..." interpretation of BS might be a useful tool for minimizing concern about frogs hopping out of their mouths and creating movement towards "Better Speech".

When anyone has an idea to share, e.g. when it might initially sound obvious to others or not immediately make sense to others, they can start with "just a BS question/idea". After a couple of months I heard that the BS approach was contributing to more open verbal communication: "We now have encouragement to share more ideas and now have more Better Speech discussions".

Part II Examples across Cultures

An Intercultural Comparison

When comparing norms across cultures from a theoretical or 'should be' perspective, there can often be agreement related to some of the Finnish positive and risky examples in the model. Intercultural discussion and comparison can bring awareness of where the shared overlap ends in different business contexts.

For example, when different cultures are included in an intercultural comparison, misinterpretations and miscommunication related to Finnish autonomy and communication norms often comes to the surface. The differences are mainly influenced by *different levels of talk, silence and hierarchical leadership*.

This leads us to the concept of '*cultural reservation points*'. The same communication and leadership norms can rarely gain commitment from subordinates in all cultures in the same way. Awareness of cultural limits across cultures can bring awareness of what norms can't be 'exported' into the other culture's business context. Nevertheless, awareness of cultural reservation points can also open the door for 'importing' at least a little bit from the leadership and/or communication norms of other cultures. This example is also relevant for movement from one company to another in the same culture.

I will briefly introduce possible misunderstandings between Finnish, Japanese, French and American business people. All the examples should be interpreted as 'might be' examples. Here is an example of communication norms. When we focus on silence during disagreement about something, the Finns and Japanese might be silent while the French and Americans are talking the most and perhaps misinterpreting the silence to mean agreement or no interest.

The Finnish and Japanese participants would probably also misinterpret each other's silence. The Finnish silence would most likely be linked to positive active silence related to thinking about the issue before asking questions or giving a good counter argument. The Japanese silence could be similar to the Finnish silence but is more likely to focus on creating harmony before speaking. On the other hand, during this misinterpretation between talk and silence, the French and Americans might not be comfortable with each other's ways of talking, e.g., interrupting.

If we look at leadership norms in these four cultures, the Japanese hierarchy is highest, followed down by the French, Americans and Finns. When we add these hierarchical differences to differences in communication norms, we can notice some intercultural challenges from the perspective of Finns and others.

A combination of Finnish positive active silence and 'self-bossed' responsibility related to autonomy is rarely understood and respected, from a Finnish perspective, by Japanese, French and American leaders. Therefore, the communication and leadership norms of French or American leaders can often reinforce each other in risky ways from a Finnish perspective with too much verbal interference with autonomy rights and responsibility. In contrast,

Japanese communication and leadership norms can reinforce each other in different risky ways, from a Finnish perspective, with limited autonomy and too much silent decision making upstairs.

What are the challenges for others when the Japanese, French and Americans have a Finnish manager? Finnish communication and leadership norms can reinforce each other in risky ways from a French, American and Japanese perspective: a combination of too much silent respect for autonomy, e.g., waiting with an open door for subordinates, which can be interpreted as irresponsible and unsupportive leadership. Rational discussion about these cultural differences can open the door to creation of a Shared Third Space.

A Finnish vs. American Comparison

Given the limited space in this article and my experience in both Finland and the United States, I will focus on a few examples related to interaction between Finns and Americans (Berry 2008, 2009: Appendix 6). None of the examples should be interpreted as stereotypes. They are simply examples that Americans and Finns can use to explore the diversity and commonality of personal and cultural norms in the two cultures. Readers from other cultures can reflect on whether their norms are closer to the Finnish or the American norms and how they are different from both.

For example, a Finnish manager in the United States can benefit from no longer just leaving his/her door open, and an American manager in Finland can benefit from understanding the importance of respecting Finnish 'self-bossed' autonomy. On the other hand, Finns can benefit from taking a few steps towards thinking and communicating out loud not only in the United States but also in Finland, while Americans can benefit from taking a few steps towards Finnish positive active silence in both Finland and the United States.

These few steps can be very useful on both sides. When compared with Finnish norms, American communication and leadership norms have more active talk, less autonomy, and less positive active silence. This difference leads to different expectations on both sides. A combination of expectations related to 'obvious', 'promise', 'respect', and 'trust' can often lead to an American misinterpretation of Finnish autonomy and positive active silence prior to positive talk. Likewise, these 'risk words' can often lead to a Finnish misinterpretation of American communication and leadership norms.

The positive American talk (from an American perspective) can often be interpreted by Finns as negative talk – absence of respect for a Finnish subordinate. In contrast, American subordinates can often

misinterpret Finnish positive active silence related to the Finnish respect for autonomy. How do these examples relate to 'trust'? Here we come to one example: the Finnish absence of the word 'promise' when making a promise to do something (communication tool #5).

Perhaps in contrast to many cultures, the use of the Finnish word 'promise' within Finland can raise the following question for Finns. When a Finn uses the word 'promise' in Finnish, there is a kind of 'why did s/he and/or why did I have to use the word 'promise' in Finnish? Perhaps someone is very busy or the task is very difficult given other commitments. How might the powerful invisible communication of a Finnish promise (tool #5), which is a foundation of trust in the Finnish cultural mind, lead Finns towards misinterpreting Americans when they say they will do something?

The role of the word 'promise' in American English tends to have the opposite role when using and not using the word 'promise'. Depending on the context and the person, an American "I will do it" might mean "I want to get the ball rolling as soon as possible" without using the word 'promise' to make explicit the promise side of communication. Therefore, it is very logical from an American perspective that American communication norms expect self and others to discuss what might be obvious in order to check up on both what a person means and how things are going (Appendix 2 for American communication norms).

An American might also say "you know" when telling something that the other person already knows. Perhaps that is a polite way to communicate the following: "I need to remind myself and others about what might not be obvious". This open double checking on self and others, which is related in some ways to thinking out loud, is very important for the American concept of trust. This is related to an American taken-for-granted presumption that one *important goal of small talk is to end up with important talk.*

How do Finns often misinterpret these American norms when Americans refer to the so-called obvious with 'you know' and don't use the word 'promise'? Not necessarily in a positive way. For example, the Finn in me has difficulty coping with the 'you know' communication related to the obvious and the failure (from a Finnish perspective) of Americans to act according to their words.

Nevertheless, the American roots in me contribute to understanding the cultural logic in the American communication norms. Perhaps this is why I suggest that a few Finnish steps towards American communications norms can create more positive useful talk from both a Finnish and American perspective and also reduce the amount of risk silence which can interfere with 'trust' on both

sides. I also suggest that Americans and everyone coming from what I call the 'imperialism of discomfort with silence' can create more positive talk among themselves and with Finns if they take a few steps towards Finnish positive active silence.

We can't always trust the competence and the character of the other, even within one's own culture. Thus, everyone can benefit from developing ways to trust their own ability to cope with the situation. This brings us back to the goal of becoming more '*response able*': ability to respond in an appropriate way for self and others, which is a never ending development process.

When talking with others, especially from another culture, it is often useful to politely ask the other to sum up how s/he understood one's message. This approach can clarify whether the communication process was understood in the same way on both sides.

Being polite across cultures can also raise questions about the 'risk absence' of the polite word 'please' when Finns speak English. There is no equivalent word in Finnish. Courtesy is implicitly communicated in a way that Finns understand, while others might be confused or offended when English-speaking Finns fail to use such language.

I will end with one more Finnish vs. American example. When arriving in the United States people might smile and ask me "how's it going?" As I start to answer, I turn and exercise my neck as they walk by. The Finn in me provides a basis for good neck exercise after getting off the airplane. I don't hear the simple American "hi"; I heard the Finnish 'mitä kuuluu?' ("how are you?") which, according to Finnish expectations, requires some clarification. Fortunately my neck feels better and I become aware of my misinterpretation across the cultures deep in me. Unfortunately, my neck misses the exercise during the rest of my visit to see relatives and old friends.

When are we so-called losers and winners in intercultural contexts? Having lived half my life in the United States and half in Finland, I have learned a lot about both cultures. Nevertheless, I can sometimes be trapped by the Finn in me when in the United States and also by the American roots in me when living in Finland. The contradictory taken-for-granted Finnish and American expectations in me can blind me to the cultural richness of the other side, but awareness of this intercultural reality can often open my eyes. If I need continuous awareness of this intercultural paradoxical reality, perhaps this is also the case for Finns and Americans as well as people from other cultures.

Contact information: michael.berry@utu.fi. For more information related to Finnish cultural richness, go to www.tse.fi/Units/Units for Language and Business Education>Development projects.

Appendix 1

Tools for Rebuilding the Image of Finnish Hiljaisuus

Looking in the mirror together contributes to discovering, interpreting and communicating taken-for-granted Finnish cultural meanings of silence often hidden from self and others. There are often 'invisible misunderstandings' hiding the multiculturalism in the shared international language: 'false friends' / 'risk words', which everyone is using while influenced by the meanings in their native language. Awareness of this challenge began in intercultural communication courses during which Finnish and exchange students became teacher-learners of each other, and the author became a privileged learner.

Multiple Hidden Meanings in Shy

During group discussions students were encouraged to move back and forth between English and their native languages to discover what additional words they could have used to send the social meanings that they believed they were sending when using the word 'shy' (ujo) to describe Finns. The following is presented as the kind of Finnish and English forms of statements that were often made during these group discussions: Suomalaiset ovat (Finns are), Suomalainen on (a Finn is): ujo (socially timid, careful), hiljainen (quiet in style and amount of talk, silent), arka (timid, cautious, sensitive), pidättyväinen (tactful, reserved, reticent), varautunut (cautious in order to be prepared before acting/talking inappropriately in a new situation, reserved, observant), hienotunteinen (discrete, considerate, tactful) and herkkä (positive: sensitive to others' feelings, and negative: easily upset). Most Finnish users interpreted these words as neutral or positive unless preceded implicitly or explicitly by 'too/liian'. A common question by Finnish students during their discussions was: *why are we using shy when we have all these other options?* The answer was often: *because everyone else says we are shy* (Berry, Carbaugh, and Nurmikari-Berry, 2004).

Communicating Finnish Silence in Different Languages

The 'shy' example above, which is related to 'silence' emerged over time during courses with multicultural groups. When there were no exchange students in an American culture course to help the Finnish students become aware of how to communicate their taken-for-

granted cultural richness associated with being 'silent/quiet', a new level of awareness came to the surface.

This awareness of the need to make the positive sides of Finnish comfort with quietness more explicit led to the creation of an exercise to encourage movement back and forth between Finnish and English while thinking in Finnish about everyday communication related to (1) *positive active silence*, (2) *positive relaxing silence*, and (3) *negative active/passive silence* (Berry 2009: Appendix 5).

Semantic clusters in 5 languages

Here is a short list of Finnish, English, French, German, and Spanish words/phrases semantically associated with *hiljainen* (silent/quiet) and *hiljaisuus* (silence/quietness) that were discussed during the courses as well as those produced during the exercise. They are listed separately rather than translated.

(1) Finnish: odottava, kuunteleminen, keskittyminen, kiinnostunut, kommunikoida ilman sanoja, kohtelias, olla omissa oloissaan, kunnioittaa ja antaa muille tilaa, rauhallinen miettiminen, harkita, mietiskellä.

(2) English: listening carefully, focusing on something, showing interest, communicating without words, being polite, being in one's own thoughts, respecting and giving private space to others, thinking (hard), willing to wait for one's turn to talk, being calm, etc.;

(3) French: attendre, écouter, se concentrer sur quelque chose, être intéressé, communiquer sans mots, être poli, aimer être seul, respecter et donner de la place aux autres, penser tranquillement, réfléchir, penser.

(4) German: erwartungsvoll, das Zuhören, sich auf etwas konzentrieren, interessiert, ohne Worte kommunizieren, höflich, für sich sein, andere respektieren und anderen Raum gewähren, ruhig über etwas nachdenken, überlegen, nachdenken.

(5) Spanish: estar esperando, escuchar, concentrarse, estar interesado, comunicar sin palabras, ser cortés, estar consigo mismo, respetar y dejarles espacio a los demás, pensar tranquilamente, reflexionar, meditar.

To sum up these semantic clusters, being too silent/shy can definitely carry negative meanings in Finnish culture. In contrast, ***relaxing silence is one important cultural natural way to be and Finnish socially positive active silence integrates Finnish comfort with being silent as well as talking.*** These positive meanings are often invisible to people from other cultures. Nevertheless, when words and phrases with shared meanings are used to communicate

Finnish cultural meanings, everyone can benefit from no longer relying on 'proper' dictionary translation. Each of the semantic alternatives listed above offers examples that can be integrated into sentences that offer examples of positive, active Finnish silence.

Introducing Finnish silence in 5 languages

Here are ten examples of ways to introduce Finnish silence to people from other cultures. These examples were created by students and language teachers at the Turku School of Economics. You will notice that there is acknowledgment of the negative sides of silence but the focus is on positive sides that are often invisible for others. A poster download is available at www.tse.fi >Units>Unit for Languages and Business Communication>Development Projects.

1

a: English: You have probably noticed that we Finns do not talk as much as people in your culture.

b: French: Vous avez probablement remarqué que les Finlandais ne parlent pas autant que les gens dans votre culture.

c: German: Bestimmt haben Sie bemerkt, dass Finnen nicht so viel reden wie Leute in Ihrer Kultur.

d: Russian: Возможно, вы заметили, что финны говорят меньше, чем представители вашей культуры.

e: Spanish: Se habrán dado cuenta de que los finlandeses no hablan tanto como la gente de su cultura.

2

a: English: Our silence does have negative sides when we are too silent for negative reasons.

b: French: Notre silence a des côtés négatifs quand nous sommes trop silencieux pour des raisons négatives.

c: German: Unser Schweigen hat freilich auch negative Seiten, wenn wir etwa aus negativen Gründen zu schweigsam sind.

d: Russian: В нашей культуре в неразговорчивости (тишине, молчании) есть отрицательные стороны, они проявляются, когда мы молчаливы по негативным причинам (молчание – негативно).

e: Spanish: Evidentemente nuestro silencio tiene también aspectos negativos si estamos demasiado silenciosos por razones negativas.

3

a: English: Our Active Finnish silence is full of non-verbal communication (communicating without words).

b: French: Notre silence actif finlandais est plein de communication non-verbale.

c: German: Das finnische aktive Schweigen ist voll von non-verbaler Kommunikation.

d: Russian: Наша активная тишина наполнена невербальным общением (общением без слов).

e: Spanish: Nuestro silencio activo finlandés está lleno de comunicación no-verbal (comunicar sin palabras).

4

a: English: When our minds are active other Finns can see how we are communicating without words. This activity is probably hidden from you.

b: French: Lorsque nos esprits sont actifs, les autres Finlandais peuvent voir comment nous communiquons sans mots. Cette activité est probablement cachée pour vous.

c: German: Wenn wir gedanklich aktiv (bei der Sache) sind, können andere Finnen sehen, wie wir wortlos kommunizieren. Diese Aktivität ist für Sie möglicherweise verborgen.

d: Russian: Когда наше сознание активно работает, финны видят, как мы общаемся без слов. Этот процесс, возможно, скрыт от вас.

e: Spanish: Cuando nuestra mente está activa, otros finlandeses pueden ver cómo estamos comunicando sin palabras. Esta actividad le quedará oculta.

5

a: English: Finns prefer to have active silence before talking to the point. We believe it is sensible (asiallinen) to be sticking to the point (asiassa pysyvä) and to talk about the fact of the matter (asiasta puhuminen). This is common when discussing something important. It is not very common when friends want to be joking with each other.

b: French: Les Finlandais préfèrent avoir un silence actif avant de parler. Ils pensent qu'il est approprié de parler des faits et de ne pas s'éloigner du sujet. Cela est fréquent lorsqu'on parle de quelque chose d'important. Ce n'est pas très fréquent quand on veut plaisanter avec ses amis.

c: German: Finnen benötigen eine gewisse Zeit mit aktivem Schweigen, bevor sie sich zu einer Sache äußern. Sie glauben, es ist vernünftig auf diese Weise zum Thema zu kommen und über die Sache zu sprechen. Bei Diskussionen zu wichtigen Themen ist das üblich. Allerdings nicht, wenn Freunde untereinander Witze machen.

d: Russian: Финны предпочитают делать паузы (период активной тишины), активно молчать, прежде чем обсуждать проблему. Они считают, что разумно говорить по существу, о самой сути дела. Это обычно касается обсуждения важных вопросов, но не шутиливой дружеской беседы.

e: Spanish: Los finlandeses prefieren mantener un silencio activo antes de hablar de un tema preciso. Piensan que es razonable ir al grano y hablar de un tema concreto. Esto es común cuando se habla de algo importante. No es muy común cuando los amigos quieren bromear entre sí.

6

a: English: In many cultures people talk quickly to show they are actively listening. In Finland we often have a lot of active silence and communicate without words when we are actively listening.

b: French: Dans plusieurs cultures, les gens parlent rapidement pour montrer qu'ils écoutent activement. En Finlande, nous avons souvent beaucoup de silence actif et nous communiquons sans mots que nous écoutons.

c: German: In vielen Kulturen sagen die Leute schnell etwas, um zu zeigen, dass sie aktiv zuhören. In Finnland dagegen haben wir ziemlich viel aktives Schweigen und sagen ohne Worte, dass wir aktiv zuhören.

d: Russian: Во многих культурах люди быстро говорят, чтобы показать, что они активно слушают. Для финнов же характерно активное молчание, невербальное общение в процессе активного слушания.

e: Spanish: En muchas culturas las personas hablan rápidamente para enseñar que están escuchando activamente. En Finlandia a menudo tenemos mucho silencio activo y comunicamos sin palabras que estamos escuchando de una manera activa.

7

a: English: Sometimes Finns are silent to hide something. I wonder if people in your culture sometimes keep talking to hide something.

b: French: Quelquefois les Finlandais sont silencieux pour cacher quelque chose. Je me demande si, dans votre culture, les gens continuent quelquefois à parler pour cacher quelque chose.

c: German: Manchmal schweigen die Finnen, um etwas zu verbergen. Könnte es sein, dass in Ihrer Kultur die Leute manchmal reden, um etwas zu verbergen?

d: Russian: Иногда финны молчат с целью утаить что-либо. Интересно, в вашей культуре люди иногда много говорят, чтобы скрыть что-либо?

e: Spanish: A veces los finlandeses se callan para ocultar algo. ¿Es posible que en su cultura las personas a veces sigan hablando cuando quieren ocultar algo?

8

a: English: When someone else is talking, active silence is our way to show respect (for others).

b: French: Quand quelqu'un autre parle, le silence actif est notre manière de montrer du respect.

c: German: Wenn jemand anderer am Sprechen ist, ist aktives Schweigen unsere Art, Respekt zu zeigen.

d: Russian: Когда кто-то говорит, активное молчание – это способ финнов продемонстрировать уважение к говорящему.

e: Spanish: Cuando otra persona está hablando, el silencio activo es una señal de respeto (hacia los demás) de nuestra parte.

9

a: English: We are willing to wait for our turn to talk, especially if the other person is also willing to wait while we talk.

b: French: Nous sommes prêts à attendre notre tour de parole, spécialement si notre interlocuteur est aussi prêt à attendre quand nous parlons.

c: German: Wir warten, bis wir an der Reihe sind, etwas zu sagen, besonders wenn auch die andere Person wartet, während wir sprechen.

d: Russian: Мы всегда готовы подождать своей очереди, особенно, если собеседник тоже ждёт своей очереди, когда говорим мы.

e: Spanish: Estamos dispuestos a esperar nuestro turno para hablar, sobre todo si la otra persona está dispuesta a esperar mientras nosotros hablamos.

10

a: English: Sometimes our silence sends the strongest message of respect, interest, social togetherness, etc.

b: French: Quelquefois notre silence envoie le message le plus fort de respect, d'intérêt, d'affinités, etc.

c: German: Manchmal ist unser Schweigen die stärkste Botschaft für Respekt, Interesse, Zusammengehörigkeit etc.

d: Russian: Иногда наше молчание – сильнейшее проявление уважения, заинтересованности, социальной сплочённости и т.д.

e: Spanish: A veces nuestro silencio manda el mensaje más fuerte de respeto, interés, unidad social, etc.

Appendix 2

A version of American Communication Norms (Produced by American students and confirmed by the author)

1. Stating the obvious: You can never assume that someone else already knows what you are thinking and/or talking about. To be on the safe side, ask and share more than might be necessary.
2. Small talk: Americans are uncomfortable with silence; we feel the other person is bored, or not interested in what we have to say. There is a difference between small talk and real communication. Movement from small talk to big talk is another natural way to communicate.
3. Controversy: Americans are rarely afraid to talk about controversial topics; we like to play the “devil’s advocate.” The devil’s advocate is someone who introduces or supports a different point of view, maybe even states the opposite of what s/he believes, in order to have a more active debate, perhaps only to make it interesting or to really think seriously.
4. Courtesy: “If you don’t have anything nice to say, then don’t say anything at all.”
5. Conversation with strangers: Americans will talk to just about anyone, even if they have no idea who you are; always smile and say hello to those passing by.
6. Do not interrupt: It is very rude to interrupt someone talking or to talk when someone else is talking.
7. Thinking before speaking: Americans do not think about what they are going to say, they just say it. Thinking out loud.
8. Promises: Americans say but do not always do; never take something too literally.
9. Modesty (compared with Finns): Americans love to talk about themselves; we will talk ourselves up to make us look good in front of others. We also want to hear about others.
10. Emotions: Americans are very expressive. We also want to hear about others.
11. Appropriateness: Not all Americans want to hear every detail of your personal life, i.e., do not talk about something grotesque like surgery at dinner time. Choose topics according to setting and those around you.
12. Politeness: Always say please and thank you; it is a sign of respect and considered rude if you don’t, even if it’s for something small like holding a door for someone.

13. Voice volume: Not everyone wants to hear your conversation with someone, use appropriate voice volume when around others.
14. Eye contact: Americans like to have eye contact when talking; it shows you are interested in what the other person has to say but do not stare.
15. Asking questions: You can never ask too many questions! Asking questions shows you are interested in the other person and you want to learn more about them or a particular subject.
16. Open and honest: If Americans don't openly verbalize their individual personal feeling with each other, they feel socially disconnected.

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Our Eyes, Ears and Tongues

DO WE ALWAYS USE THEM IN A USEFUL WAY?

We are often unaware of what our eyes and ears don't see or hear and what the eyes and ears of others don't see or hear when we are being/acting and our tongues are active/inactive. Eyes and ears bring information to our brains, but personal and cultural experiences often limit our ability to see and hear the deeper meanings of cultural ways of living and communicating.

As more awareness of our taken-for-granted attitudes about self and others comes to the surface, our brains encourage our eyes and ears to look and listen below the surface and our tongues to begin to have the voice of a mediator and facilitator.

As mediators, group members can develop competence for discovering, interpreting and communicating meanings plus competence for helping others move in the same direction. As facilitators, they can begin to help each other ask themselves and others meaningful, even provocative, questions during their group discussions. We can benefit from becoming mediators and facilitators at home, on main street, at work and across cultures.