THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF JAPAN AND INDIA

[1]Antyakula Nivedita & [2]DVR Murthy
[1]Student, [2]Professor
[1]Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication,
[1]Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India

ABSTRACT: *Since organizations are a part of socio-cultural environment, organizations are deemed as mini-cultures that possess a) value systems, b) process information with a unique perceptual perspective, c) develop socio-relations with co-members, and d) communicate using distinctive verbal and nonverbal cues (Neuliep, 2005). Obviously, these verbal and nonverbal cues and their meaning are derived from the social and cultural context in which the organization operates. Likewise, the way in which recipients of the verbal and nonverbal cues interpret its meaning is affected by their individual, social, and cultural experience. From this premise, we can state that organizational communication and thereby the department of corporate communication and its communication practices are affected by the general societal and organizational culture. The present paper discusses the influence of culture on nonverbal communication in the corporate communication department of two organizations located in Asia – Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan and RINL-VSP, India.*

Key Words: : *culture, organization, nonverbal communication, corporate communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is social interaction through messages (Fiske, 1990; Bovee and Thill, 2000). Clearly, as one grows older, the cultural values that one has learnt and adapted himself / herself to, also moulds their daily practices, which to a greater extent is reflected in their communication (Amir, 2009: 3). Communication is primarily divided into two types: (a) verbal and (b) nonverbal communication (Ferraro, 1990: 45). Verbal communication is further divided into written and oral communication (Nelson and Harris, 2008). Written communication in its most basic sense includes the written / printed word, and oral communication comprises spoken words (Salter and Langford-Wood: 2002). On the other hand, nonverbal communication does not include either the written or spoken (oral) word, but is learnt chiefly through observation and imitation (Samovar and Porter, 2003: 239). For example, scholars like Remland (2003: 368), Hargie and Dickson (2004), and Nelson and Harris (2008) opine that nonverbal communication involves conveying emotions, attitudes, and feelings through facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, motions, body language, clothing, tone of voice, and use of space and time.

1.1 Culture and Communication

Culture[1] is strongly connected with communication since communication makes culture a continuous process (Samovar and Porter, 2003: 10). Also, culture is nothing but 'a social inheritance' (Charon, 1999: 44); in the sense that culture as a code is learnt and shared among members of the society, and obviously, this learning and sharing requires communication. Thus, culture and communication are strongly interrelated. For example, Patel et al. (2011: 18) note that, culture that is learnt and shared is passed on from one generation to next generation through a range of communication processes, otherwise known as cultural institutions such as the mass media, language, education, stories, folktales, mythology, and proverbs (ibid), in other words, every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication. Thus, communication helps in the transmission of culture and culture itself is

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[1] Culture is defined as a way of life of people living in a society (Giddens, 2005). It is transmitted from one generation to the next generation (Sitaram, 1993), is ethnocentric (Lustig and Koester, 2003), endures over long periods of time (Samovar and Porter, 2003) and needs a medium to be transmitted and shared (Smith, 1986; Hartley, 2003; Oswell, 2006). At the core of culture lies knowledge, experience, customs, rituals, values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, art, law, ethics, morals, material objects and possessions, and other capabilities and habits that are acquired by man as a member of society either through individual or group strivings (Kuper, 2000: 56). Factors like history, family, and religion influence culture (Patel et al., 2011).

communication – in the sense, communication is an expression of a community's culture (ideas, thoughts, traditions, customs, values, beliefs, norms, and so on) and culture in turn embodies a community's communication, information needs, and practices. Now, for culture to be communicated, a communication medium is required, which may either be verbal or nonverbal communication media. For instance, according to Fisher (1978), aspects of culture are expressed through verbal and nonverbal communication. Subtly, this means that the choice of the communication medium be it verbal or nonverbal can have cultural overtones (Nelson and Harris, 2008).

2. HIGH-LOW-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION

Communication is the act of giving, receiving, or exchanging information, ideas, opinions, and emotions by two or more persons either through words (verbal), behavior (nonverbal), or material things (physical artefacts). Nevertheless, communication does not take place in vacuum, and hence needs a context to occur. There are various contexts on which human communication is dependant such as physical, social, psychological, physiological, and cultural. Of all these contexts, cultural context is said to have the most defining influence on human communication. This is because, culture provides the overall schema wherein human beings learn to organize their cognitive, affective, and behavioural choices in relation to their environment (Keesing, 1974); in other words, culture teaches individuals to think, to feel, to act, and to interact with others – all in all, to communicate. Arguably, each culture has its own preferred social manners and style of communication. This is because cultures are diverse, and therefore, communication practices tend to be different.

Now, depending on the contextual features present during communication, some individuals choose to focus on the verbal codes than on the nonverbal codes, while others actively prefer the nonverbal elements of the context to communicate. The former is described as low-context (the extent to which one gathers information from the verbal code or the text) and the latter as high-context (the extent to which one gathers information from the context/ situation /background or environment connected to an event, a situation, or an individual). High-context communication draws on the physical aspects as well, including the relation between the interlocutors and time and situation in which the communication takes place.

Hall (1976, cited in Nishimura et al., 2008: 784; Andaya, 2010) argues that people's cultural values and beliefs determine their communication, and hence, communication styles and practices of a society can best be understood from the culture of those societies. Thus, according to Hall (1976), a culture's communication tends to be either high-context or low-context and cultures that promote high-context and low-context communication are referred to as the high-context and low-context cultures respectively. However, in order to gain a broad understanding of the communication (verbal and/or nonverbal) of both high-context and low-context cultures, it is important to have a broad overview of those cultures in which such communicative patterns exist and operate. For example, Andaya (2010) states that in high-context cultures, the focus is on building long-lasting relationships over a wider time span. Hence, this type of society comprises individuals who already know each other, and therefore know how to behave in a specific context since they have had a long cultural exposure in the setup. Therefore, such societal framework is more collectivistic (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gudykunst et al., 1996), and since the members of high-context society share a long history of common values and assumptions, they are culturally homogenous. Japan (*Nippon-koku / Nihon-koku*), an island nation in East Asia is the best example for collectivistic and high-context communication culture. Two reasons can be cited in this regard – geographical and historical.

Geographically, Japan is often prone to frequent natural calamities like earthquakes, volcanoes, typhoons, and so on. Secondly, Japan did not suffer military invasions from other countries due to the perilous straits separating itself from the rest of Asia, and hence, its cultural identity has never been threatened (Hume, 1995). As a consequence of their historical insularity and geographical condition, Japan has developed a strong sense of cultural identity based on homogeneity: people who spoke a common language, maintained the country with one race, and shared strong social, political, religious, and artistic traditions (ibid).

Apart from these factors, the Tokugawa era (1604-1868), a prominent era in Japanese history, has had a considerable influence on the Japanese style of functioning. For example, Ouchi (1981) explains that the basics of Japanese management can be traced back to the Tokugawa's era. During that time, the Japanese have been prohibited from having "any" contact with the foreigners, which has led to a strong sense of identity and loyalty to the nation. The Tokugawa rule has instilled a strong sense of collectivism and group orientation in the Japanese (Hirschmeire and Yui, 1981). For example, during the Tokugawa era the Japanese society was divided into strict social standings such as emperor, shogun (military lord), daimyo,

samurai (warriors), farmers, artisan, and merchants, with further differentiation into subgroup and intragroup hierarchy. Alongside, the rulers prescribed strict behaviour for nearly every aspect of social and personal conduct so as to ensure peace and harmony within the group. In this way, the individual was subjugated to the greater social order. Thus, the characteristics of the Tokugawa rule were translated into an enduring dedication to social and organizational formality in today's Japanese management.

Significantly, many scholars have observed that Japanese collectivism and group orientation can be attributed to the agrarian roots of the Japanese society. Japan has predominately been an agriculture society (Ben-Dasan, 1970). Since agriculture is strongly influenced by weather and climatic conditions, the Japanese farmers had to plant, transplant, and harvest rice according to the strictly prescribed schedules. This made Japanese farmers time-conscious by adhering to strict schedules and industrious. These traits were further carried on to the factories after industrialization, where the farmers became factory workers. Thus, such traditional traits contributed to a sense of punctuality, unity, cooperation, and belongingness among the modern Japanese (Matsumura, 1984).

Besides Japan, India too is an example of high-context, collectivistic culture. The high-context and collectivistic nature of India can be attributed to its family system – joint / extended. According to Gannon (2001), family plays a dominant factor in the Indian society, from which an acute sense of dependence, integrity, loyalty, and unity develops in the individual that serves to strengthen the participative and collective nature of the society. Besides, Indian society is also agrarian, and is therefore, collectivistic in its roots.

Hence, according to Patel et al. (2011: 102), in such close-knit cultures like the Japanese and Indian, communication whether verbal or nonverbal, is usually done on the pretext of boosting long-term relationship, mutual understanding, and respect among all parties. The purpose of such communication apparently is to promote relationships and harmony among individuals (Carpenter, 2005). Under such circumstances, individuals constituting this type of society do not find it necessary to verbalise everything explicitly, since there is a shared background between people. Feelings are communicated with few words, silence, or through subtle nonverbal cues (JETRO[2], 1999; Lustig and Koester, 1999: 108). Hence, Hall (1976: 91) defines communication in a high-context culture in this way:

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.

In addition, high-context cultures use indirect styles of speech, so as to preserve harmony. For example, collectivist cultures such as India, Greece, and Japan use "we" even to express a personal viewpoint. As such, high-context cultures are largely found in most Asian countries (Lustig and Koester, 1999).

Therefore, in high-context cultures, developing a context for communicating information is very important to its members. This is based on the premise that context is what gives meaning to information and lends authenticity to information, and without the context, the information cannot be understood as it should be. It is only after establishing this context, does the sender of the message continue with the main message (Beamer and Varner, 2011).

On the other hand, unlike the high-context societies, low-context societies are communities where the relationship of members has been built only for a short period (Hall, 1976). Since the members of the community do not enjoy long-lasting relationships, it is quite evident that they also do not share a long history of common values and beliefs. Therefore, it becomes important to communicate everything explicitly through verbal means. Consequently, such cultures are individualistic, and hence, the communication style is usually short and direct, with the emphasis on 'I' in direct speech (Gudykunst, 1991). United States and Northern Europe are low-context cultures; however, there are some cultures that share the characteristics of both high-context and low-context systems and these include the French, English, Italian, and a few others (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). By default, India too is a rare example for both high-low-context communication cultures. Originally, India is a high-context culture because of its collectivistic roots. India is also low-context because, India was ruled by the British for over 200 years (Basham, 2007), and owing to the impact of European colonialism, India's collectivism was dominated by the individualistic Western culture resulting in low-context communication culture.

2.1 Organizational Communication

In an organizational setup, different modes of running an organization have been proved to be associated with a particular system of communication (Korine, 1999). For instance, members of an

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[2] Japan External Trade Research Organization

organization may either choose to communicate verbally (textual / pictures / sound) and / or communicate through behaviour, symbols, and a set of artefacts. Thus, verbal and nonverbal elements are the primary means of communication the organizations use to maintain contact with their internal and external publics. Evidently, in an organization, verbal and nonverbal elements are also the primary means of communication through which various aspects of culture are expressed, in the sense, a great deal of information about an organization's culture can be ascertained through the various verbal and nonverbal practices employed by the organization. This further indicates that communication process is affected by the verbal and nonverbal cues used, which emerge from the value orientation of the organization due to which a certain type of cue is preferred when compared to the other.

Contextual features ⟶ Communication elements[3] ⟶ Message

Notably, in a low-context culture, individuals gather information from the explicit verbal code. Conversely, in a high-context communication culture, message is to be understood through a context, also known as communication setting, thereby, increasing the importance of nonverbal communication (and minimizing the content of verbal messages). This is not to say that only nonverbal communication takes precedence in a high-context culture. Even verbal communication (written and spoken) occurs in a high-context culture, but in a very much indirect and implicit manner, typified by extreme politeness and discretion. This is because, no culture can exist exclusively on one end of the continuum, say, high-context or low-context continuum but may display both the features; it is only that a culture may be more high-context and more collectivistic than some other culture and vice-versa depending on a particular time, place, and occasion (Hall, 1976).

In intercultural communication studies, culture is an important context. As corporate communication is an act of communication, obviously, it needs a cultural context to occur, and the present paper primarily deals with the role 'cultural context' plays in the nonverbal communication practices of the corporate communication department of two steel organizations, i.e., Kobe Steel Ltd., Japan and RINL-VSP, India.

2.2 High-low-context Communication: Japan and India

Japan and India are noted collectivistic cultures, and collectivistic cultures are characterized by the subtleties of the unspoken elements of the situational context. This is because, in collectivistic cultures, owing to strong and lasting group affiliation, individuals know each other intimately and understand each other and their appropriate role. This group affiliation is abetted by a high degree of social formality resulting in behavioural protocols. Therefore, one acts according to one's role and interpret messages based on their accumulation of shared experiences and expectations, resulting in high-context communication culture. Hence, collectivistic cultures are nevertheless high-context cultures. The present paper focuses on the high-context communication of both Japan and India. However, a significant anomaly has to be pointed out here – i.e., Indian communication culture is low-context as well; it should be recalled that the dimensions of cultural variability do coexist in cultures. For example, though it is argued that Indian communication culture has long been closer to high-context culture than low-context culture, the Indian communication style started to resemble the low-context communication owing to the country's history of colonization and the consequent influence of western values. This means that cultures with western European roots rely heavily on low-context communication. So, the present paper also essentially points out to the low-context communication of India along with its high-context nature of communication.

Further, collectivistic and group-orientated cultures like Japan and India are also high-power distance cultures (Hofstede, 1980). So naturally, high-power distance cultures exhibit high-context communication culture. The high-power distance culture in Japan and India has a historical basis. For example, during the Tokugawa era in Japan, the strict class system based on the Confucian philosophy has led to vertical,

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[3] Verbal communication elements are the written and spoken word; written communication includes memos, email, faxes, letters, networked intranet bulletin boards, internet web pages, user manuals, handbooks, annual reports, brochures, printed reports, written policies / procedures, news stories, press releases, advertising campaigns and so on (Nelson and Harris, 2008). Spoken communication includes face-to-face communication, meetings, decision-making, interviewing, giving and receiving orders, telephonic conversations, teleconferences, word-of-mouth statements and instructions to public (Langford-Wood and Salter, 2002; Beamer and Varner, 2011).

Nonverbal communication includes such elements as facial / eye contact, kinesics, appearance, time, space / territoriality, language, paralinguistics, olfactory, and hepatic cues (Nelson and Harris, 2008).

hierarchical relationships in the Japanese society (Donahue, 1998). Like Japanese Confucianism, Hinduism, a prominent religion of India, also exhibits social stratification, each ranked differently in terms of social order (Beamer and Varner, 2011: 113). Thus, of particular importance in a high-power distance and high-context culture is the social relationship between the individuals, especially their status (ibid). As a result, superiors can influence and persuade their subordinates by virtue of their status, which is determined by a combination of factors such as age, gender, rank, social position, and so on. Also, in such high-context cultures that are collectivistic and high on power distance, group harmony, social order, conformity in group relations, and obedience to authority is the norm. Hence, not surprisingly, it is pointed out that relational orientation in high-context cultures are collectivistic, lineal, authoritarian, and specific-prescribed (Condon and Yousef, 1975) and the explicit nonverbal and implicit verbal communication practices of high-context cultures nevertheless portray such relational orientation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the research study, two select steel organizations located in Japan and India were chosen. The Japanese steel organization, Kobe Steel, Ltd. (*Kabushiki-gaisha Kobe Seiko-sho*) operating worldwide under the brand KOBELCO, is a major Japanese steel organization located in Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo, Japan. The Indian steel organization, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (RINL-VSP) is the most advanced steel organization located in Visakhapatnam, India. Therefore, this research study, which is an ethnographic study, uses case study method to explore the influence of culture on the corporate communication practices in these two steel organizations. One such practice is nonverbal communication. The present research paper aims to highlight culture's influence on nonverbal communication in the corporate communication department of Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan and RINL-VSP, India. A multi-pronged approach was used to collect the data that consisted primarily of interviews (face-to-face and unstructured), followed by observations, documentary evidences, and physical artefacts. Field notes was maintained by the researcher that facilitated data recording. The ethnographic research in both the research sites took nearly two years for the collection of data, i.e., 2012 – 2014. The gaps in the research study were addressed through email correspondence from 2015-2017.

In Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan, the corporate communication department is known as the Publicity Group (PG), whereas in RINL-VSP it is known as Corporate Communication (CC) department. From Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan, Hiroyuki Yabuki, the deputy general manager and Gary Tsuchida, assistant manager of the Publicity Group, Kobe Steel Ltd., Japan assisted the researcher in her work. In RINL-VSP, B.S. Satyendra, the assistant general manager, D. Durga Prasad, deputy manager, and K. Bangar Raju, media relations in-charge of the Corporate Communication department contributed to this researcher work with their valuable inputs. The interviews, which were in English, took place at the corporate headquarters of each organization, i.e., in Tokyo and Visakhapatnam.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since culture is a set of shared behaviours accepted by a particular group of people and manifested in practices, it is here that communication is widely studied as a means of transmitting culture. Indeed, extant research establishes that communication (verbal and nonverbal) and its meaning is derived from the social, cultural, and historical context in which the communication takes place. It implies that the basic communication process, i.e., sending and interpreting of a message is affected by individual, social, and cultural experiences (Clark, 1977; Barney, 1986; Harrop and Varey, 1998; Olkkonen et al., 2000).

In an organizational framework, communication is defined as a social process of interaction and / or interpretation that gives sense and meaning to social reality, organizational actions, events and organizational roles, and organizational processes (Mazzei, 2010). Thus, communication is equivalent to organizations and creates the social context of organizations (Tompkins and Wanca-Thibault, 2001). Various communication scholars like Claver et al. (1998) observe a communication perspective on organizations and its culture. Communication ensures the transfer of values and beliefs from one person to another within an organization, giving rise to organizational culture. In turn, this prevailing organizational culture determines the communication of the organization with all of its publics (Puth and Ewing, 1998: 106-114). For example, where the organizational culture is hierarchical, the communication between the superior and subordinate is top-down communication.

Also, Dowling (1986: 115, cited in Stuart, 1999: 202) stresses culture as a context within which communications occur, and further argued that cultural context influences everyday interactions between the organizational members and its publics. For example, day-to-day conversations, habits, and routine practices that are typically observed in all organizations are the manifest activity of underlying or latent

norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions of that particular society (Keyton, 2005). Similarly, scholars like Dutton and Penner (1992) note that an organization's culture shapes its business practices, as well as the kinds of relationships that its members establish with key publics, both internal and external. Suzuki (1997) also states that within organizations, rites, rituals, and ceremonies are regularly promoted and practiced, thus providing direct evidence of the role of communication in the transmission of culture.

4.1 Culture, Nonverbal Communication, and Corporate Communication

With regards to nonverbal communication, research has underpinned that culture plays a crucial role in nonverbal communication. For example, nonverbal communication is highly dependent on context, social situation, and power relationships. Nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, eye contact, clothing, space and territoriality, time, and so on, are also culturally regulated, and are linked to the value systems of that particular society. For example, societies with large power distance encourage emotions and nonverbal displays that reveal status differences (Bruneau, 1973; Seiler, 1984; Burgoon and Dillman, 1995; Remland, 2000, 2003). Interestingly, Remland (2000) says that, "in every workplace encounters, nonverbal communication announces and reinforces the differences in status that exist between members of an organization". For instance, the seating arrangement in an organization speaks about cultural values such as hierarchy, group orientation, or individualism (Nelson and Harris, 2008).

The subject of the influence of societal culture on the general organizational behaviour of employees and the management was the interest of several other leading academic theorists as well. Their empirical studies across cultures further strengthen the argument that culture influences communication and behaviour. For instance, Ahiauzu (1986) comments that, "it is becoming increasingly widely accepted among social scientists, especially managers and organizational theorists that the patterns of management and employee behaviour in the workplace are largely culturally-bound". Substantiating this point, Hu (1985) in his research work has highlighted that the basic Asian values such as strong family ties, conformity and harmony, benevolence and obligation, endurance and sacrifice, loss of face, shame, and honour are a part of their daily communication. In his study, the scholar found that by understanding these underlying Asian values, one can underlie the behaviours of Asians like hierarchical relationships, obligation, dependence or domination, group well-being, honouring official position, and maintaining good face. Similarly, scholars like Schneider and Barsoux (2003) describe Asian society as tribe or family, centralized and paternalistic with strong social roles, personal relationships, and social control, which are further reflected in the behaviour of the organizational members. For instance, in the place of work, collectivism, harmony, and maintaining social relationships are the main characteristics of most of the high-context cultures, especially Asian cultures (Leat and El-kot, 2007). Abdullah (1992) in one of her studies on the managerial practices in Malaysia highlighted that 'the culture of a country has a strong influence on the way people behave' as it 'plays a significant role in determining and developing the culture of an organization, its expected norms, and practices.' The face saving strategy is one of the main approaches in the Arab world, and this may be in part due to the societal structure, where employees care about the reputation of their names, families, and tribes (Twati, 2006). Further, McDaniel and Andersen (1998) through their works have argued that Zen Buddhism, a major religious influence in Asia, places a high value on silence, lack of emotional expressions, and the unspoken parts of communication that further affects communication and behaviour of individuals.

Indeed, several studies have shown that in Japan, nonverbal communication plays an important role in their communication style. For example, in an organization, to signal group membership, it is particularly important that each individual knows a person's group membership, and rank, as this provides the key to choosing the appropriate manners. Also, subordinates are required to bow deeper and longer as well as maintain less frequent eye contact than superiors. Besides, especially in the business world, calling cards (*meishi*) are commonplace and so are uniforms; this is because they signal an individual's profession (Mestre et al., 1999). Similarly, in India, the 'namaste' forms an important part of Indian etiquette and is generally used while greeting and saying good-bye (Jhunjhunwala, 2012).

Likewise, Fiol and Huff (1992) and Oliver (2000) argue that organizational identity is grounded in local meanings and organizational symbols, and thus embedded in organizational culture. Scholars like Kiriakidou and Millward (2000) also opine that organizational values that are held by staff and management is concretely manifested in organization's symbols and artefacts. For example, Oliver (2000) says that workplace artefacts promote group identity, and personal artefacts signify personal association and commitment. Abstract presentations of an organization's identity are also expressed in corporate architecture, art, office layouts, and signage (Gagliardi, 1990). Suzuki (1997) claims that organizational symbols and slogans consistently appear across a host of material aspects of the organization such as on

organization's letterhead, reports, internal and external signage, jackets, hats, and paychecks, that reveal organizational culture. Thus, studies have claimed that cultural values influence nonverbal communication, which provide essential cultural data that help frame our communication.

Since corporate communication is a part of the organization, it may be understood that the societal culture that is reflected in the organization will also encompass the corporate communication department and its practices. Bringing a link between culture and corporate communication, previous research in the corporate communication field has shown a link between culture and the various corporate communication practices (Crossman and McIlwee, 1995; Falkheimer and Heide, 2007). For instance, an actor would express human personalities and traits through cues such as body language, tone of voice, and choice of clothes, similarly, the public relations strategist highlights cues via 'behaviour, communication, and symbolism' to express a desired message, externally as well as internally (van Riel, 1995). Thus, through this paper, we attempt to show the relation between culture and nonverbal communication practices of the corporate communication department of the two organizations, Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan and RINL-VSP, India. Though many types of nonverbal communication exist, the present research paper primarily deals with proxemics (space), kinesics (gestures), haptics (touch), artefacts (business cards), and physical attire (dress / clothing) in both the countries.

5. DISCUSSION
5.1 Culture and Nonverbal Communication: Publicity Group, Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan
Seating arrangement (Proxemics)

The study of how people differ in their use of (personal) space is 'proxemics' (Lustig and Koester, 2003: 187). Individuals use this space either to communicate ownership / occupancy of areas and possessions, which in other words is referred to as territoriality, a specific form of proxemics (Nelson tyand Harris, 2008). Hence, "space" is understood as a distinct statement of power and status. The office setup of the Publicity Group, Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan is a subtle example of the relationship between territoriality and a person's place within that space.

The researcher has observed that the office of the Publicity Group does not have cubicles, and in the office settings of the Publicity Group, the seating arrangement occupies prime importance. Here, the researcher has made the following observations – normally, in Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan, many desks are arranged in the centre of a large, common room absent of walls or partitions and the employees are seated near the desks as per their hierarchical positions.

Even, the Publicity Group's office setup follows a similar layout, with desks for its employees (seven males, and one female) placed in two rows in a room. The corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group sit facing each other, in a hierarchical fashion absent of dividing walls or partitions. For instance, the deputy general manager of the Publicity Group is stationed at the head of the two rows of desks, with his desk at the top. Considered the right-hand man of the general manager, the deputy general manager is accorded the next greatest status. Two managers, one for domestic media relations and the other in-charge of advertising are positioned at the head of the rows closest to the deputy general manager and sit facing opposite each other. The assistant manager in-charge of overseas PR and the two staff members for domestic media sit in the center area. The office assistant sits closest to the entrance door.

A desk is also available for use by the general manager of the Publicity Group. His desk is located next to the window, diagonally behind the desk of the deputy general manager of the Publicity Group. Since he is at the top of the hierarchy in the department, his desk is considered the highest 'seat of honour'. Normally, in Japanese organizations, the 'seat of honour' is located near the window away from the entrance door. The middle management (general manager, deputy general manager, and the manager-level employees) sits in the open office. Only directors and corporate officers have private offices (see Fig. 1).
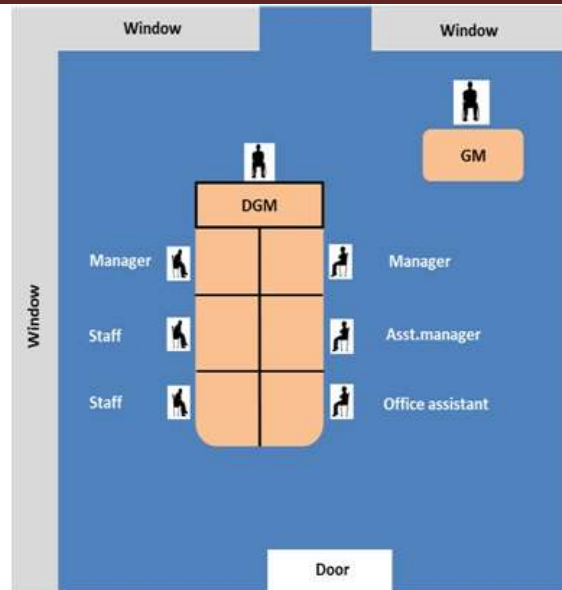
Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the seating arrangement of the Publicity Group,
Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan

From Figure 1, it is quite evident that Japan is a collectivistic culture (Kato, 1973; Ting-Toomey, 1988) where group harmony is paramount and hence, employees prefer to work together in the same physical location, not isolated by office walls and doors. Also, the seating arrangement of the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group is indicative of the cooperative environment in which they work. Perhaps, Japan's geographical isolation from the rest of the world during the Tokugawa era (1604-1868) (Ouchi, 1981), a prominent era in Japanese history, its comparatively small size in geography, and relatively large population has resulted in its people living in close physical proximity to each other. This has led to a feeling for working in common or in groups, for concern about the feelings of others. Besides, frequent natural calamities such as typhoons, earthquakes, floods, and landslides have fostered a great respect for nature and a desire to live in harmony with it, instead of trying to control it. This is exemplified by the standard Japanese office arrangement as seen in the Publicity Group of Kobe Steel, Ltd. Such an office setup encourages the exchange of information through harmonious relations, simplifies the flow of information within the workgroup, facilitates multi-task accomplishment, and promotes the Confucian[4] concept of learning through silent observation.

In addition, the hierarchical contextualization of space that is best exemplified by the standard spatial arrangement of the office of the Publicity Group reflects the cultural themes of hierarchy and group affiliation. Also, the office setup of the Publicity Group reinforces certain cultural values like group interdependence, social interaction, group cooperation, team identity, unity, and a sense of solidarity – all of which, have traditionally been derived from group affiliations like the Japanese family[5] and the yin-yang philosophy of Taoism[6] (Cheng, 1987: 34; Yum, 1987: 77). In this way, the manner in which a culture uses space is linked to its value system.

Bow **(Kinesics)**

Another well-known ritualized communication pattern in the daily social interaction of the Japanese is the bow. A bow is the most common traditional gesture associated with Japanese 'kinesics'. In Japan, a bow

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[4] Confucianism, an ancient religion that has permeated the Japanese belief system, encourages passive, quiet, and modest ways of life, and also their teachings tend to suppress frank expression of individual opinions (Beamer and Varner, 2011).

[5] The Japanese family emphasizes patriarchal composition, sharply differentiated gender roles, filial piety, and the importance of duties, obligations, and loyalty (Naito and Gielen, 2002)

[6] The balancing of contrary forces, yin-yang dyad is of prime importance in communication. Yin-yang are opposite and contrary forces – Yang is the creative, forward-pushing, systemic force and yin is the receptive, recessive, hidden and background force seen in communication between father-son, husband-wife, king-subject, and so on

is used when meeting someone, when asking for something, while apologizing, when offering congratulations, when acknowledging someone else, and when departing, to mention a few instances. For example, the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group would welcome the researcher with a bow and also say goodbye to her with a bow, with their hands firmly placed on the sides and accompanied by a small bend. The attempt is to maintain harmony (*wa*) and save face (*kao*). Historically, this stylized and ritualistic Japanese approach in communication has originated from Confucian ethics, which has gained prominence during the Tokugawa era (1604-1868) and the subsequent Meiji era (1868-1912). Further, the Confucianism concept of *Li*, the ethical principles of Confucianism, allows individuals to decide what he or she should do in a particular situation and then decide on the proper course of appropriate words and actions (Tu Wei-ming, 1976, cited in Samovar and Porter, 2003: 451). For example, the Japanese adopt a behaviour that is very formal and ritualized like the bow in order to reduce or eliminate conflict or embarrassment. It is also a sign of submission, obedience, respect, and indicates where in the hierarchy one is, i.e., hierarchical status in the society or in organization. For instance, in general, the researcher has observed that in Japan, the subordinates or a person younger in age bows first, lowest, and longest as a mark of respect and an improperly executed bow is interpreted as a significant insult. The researcher has further observed that as a reflection of the relative power distance, Japanese women bow lower than men to show that their status is not as high. Thus, a Japanese bow indicates deference / power distance in a male-dominated society like Japan[7].

Influenced by globalization, the Japanese are getting more used to the handshake (haptics) when meeting people from other cultures. When the researcher would meet with the members of the Publicity Group, occasionally, they would make a slight bow, and would shake hands with a light grip and an accompanying nod. Also, they would keep the arm firmly extended. This is perhaps done to maintain a considerable amount of distance with the researcher to suggest that they respect personal space. Thus, the image of Japan is the combination of unique Japanese culture and traditions with a blend of modernism. The reforms during the Meiji era that followed the feudal Tokugawa era reoriented the manner of functioning of the Japanese culture without breaking with the tradition. The imperialistic Meiji era (1868-1912) brought westernization to Japan, after Japan remained closed during the Tokugawa (1604-1868) feudal rule for nearly over 200 years (Sumikawa, 1999). Contact with the industrialized west thus brought the knowledge about the Western lifestyle in Japan and handshake is one such example.

Business cards (Artefacts)

A very typical nonverbal insignia of Japan is the business cards culture. Also known as *meishi* in Japan, business cards or calling cards are valuable tools of social interaction. In a high-context culture like Japan where background and context embody more information, *meishi* is one such nonverbal element that provides enough information about the individual so as to facilitate normal social exchange. The initial impression of an individual is thus derived from his or her *meishi*. The *meishi* primarily carries the individual's name, organization's name, and position, thus facilitating rapid determination of the individual's group affiliation. The card is of the appropriate size and colour (91 mm by 55 mm and in white), and is mostly in Japanese language. Some Japanese organizations that have an international presence also have their *meishi* written in English on the other side. During the process of give and take, the researcher has observed that the *meishi* is grasped with both hands held at the corners between thumb and forefinger. This "doubling" which indicates respect is accompanied with the ceremonial bowing. The lower ranking person, however, holds the card at a lower level than that of the higher ranking person, suggesting his or her lower status.

For example, after the initial introductions were orally exchanged with the researcher by the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group, Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan, the next big thing they have done was to handover their *meishi* to the researcher. This gave the researcher a fair idea about her interviewees from Japan, primarily, name, position / rank in the hierarchy, and their job roles. The researcher has further observed that the *meishi* was printed on both sides, one side in Japanese and the other side in English. The researcher has further noticed that the Publicity Group members use *meishi* boxes, also known as 'card holders' for future use or reference. As such, the *meishi* boxes are also designed to fit *meishi* of only 91 mm * 55 mm[8] (see Fig. 2).

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[7] Japan is both a high-power distance and male-dominated society (Hofstede, 1980).
[8] In an email correspondence with the researcher dated on September 26, 2016

Figure 2: *Meishi* of the Publicity Group members of Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan (Source: Researcher's file)

In the days of the Tokugawa era (1604-1868), apparels of the various classes (emperor, shogun, daimyo, samurai, peasant, artisans, and merchants) were the visible signs of rank in Japan. Soon, name cards replaced them after rapid industrialization. Because of the importance attached to rank in Japanese society, name cards, otherwise known as business cards (*meishi*) have continued to play a vital role in Japan's formalized business world. *Meishi* captures the idea of rank, respect, and role expectation in cultures that are high on power distance like Japan.

Evidently, power comes from position in the organization. Probably, one of the reasons for the popularity of *meishi* in Japan is the ease with which they allow vertical (hierarchical) relationships to be ascertained (a person is able to gauge the other person's rank and position in social hierarchy through the meishi). In Japan, interpersonal relationships are based vis-à-vis a hierarchical status. This relates to the importance of exchanging business cards (*meishi*) which indicate the relative status / position one holds in the organizational hierarchy or in a social group. The Japanese for example, need to know this to ascertain behavioural patterns and code of conduct such as the levels of politeness (*keigo*) to use while communicating, or the appropriate seating arrangement to adhere to during a meeting. The use of *meishi* thus shows that the age old Confucian-based vertical classification of the Tokugawa era exerts a large scale influence on the communication patterns of modern day Japan.

Clothing (Physical attire)

Interpersonal communication literature acknowledges that people often communicate a lot about themselves indirectly through their clothing. It is true that every organization has written and/or unwritten codes regarding dress. As Japan is a homogenous society (Hume, 1995) there is also homogeneity in appearance, in the sense, the ubiquitous dark suits (grey / black / dark blue) dominate the business world in Japan, and men and women alike normally opt for conservative styles. The researcher has observed that Japanese men wear a white shirt with a black blazer, black pant, black tie and black shoes. They also carry a black bag. Japanese women wear black skirts, and white top with black shoes and stockings. They also wear a blazer. Physical artefacts like small lapel pins or badges or identity cards identifying the individual's

organization are frequently worn. Blue-collar workers normally wear a uniform (such as coveralls and smocks) distinctive to their organization. For instance, the researcher has noticed that the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group were dressed in similar dark (black) suits with an identity card tagged around the neck (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Researcher with Gary Tsuchida (right of the researcher) and Koji Tsunashima of Kobe Steel, Ltd. in their customary black suits

     Clothing and dress tells about the attitude of individuals towards the culture in which they live and work. For example, the adherence to conservative dress styles and colours by the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group suggest an image of strong Japanese conformism, group identity, and maintaining of social balance. The values in organizations that belong to homogenous and collectivistic cultures like Japan are unification and family feeling, the ideals of which have been derived from Confucianism. The Japanese are conformists due to their emphasis on harmony, and conformity functions as a means to achieve harmony.

5.2 Culture and Nonverbal Communication: Corporate Communication department, RINL-VSP, India

     As in Japan, India's historical, religious, demographical, geographical, and familial influences coalesced to create cultural patterns that fostered values, beliefs, and attitudes that presently guide the conduct of communication within Indian organizations. Unlike the homogeneity and unified culture of Japan, Indian culture is heterogeneous and diverse (Sen, 2005). India is an amalgamation of states. Interestingly, Indian cultural values, beliefs, and conditions vary from state to state and region to region. Therefore, rather than thinking of India as one single culture, it is wiser to consider it as an association of various regional and subcultures. Also, Indian society has long been influenced by a large number of factors through time, which primarily includes the colonization by the British during the 19th century. Hence, Indian communication is dichotomous; it exhibits both high and low-context cultural features (owing to its own collectivistic roots and the influence of the individualistic British culture respectively). Therefore, in India, the concern for the self co-exists along with the collectivistic concern.

     It should be noted that this research paper on the culture's influence on nonverbal communication practices in the Indian organizational setup, i.e., the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP is based on two aspects – a) the researcher's observations from the research site, and b) the researcher's own experiences, owing to her Indian nativity.

Seating arrangement (Proxemics)

     In the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP, the researcher has found that the managerial level employees (senior and middle-level) isolate themselves in their rooms behind closed doors. This amply shows that in India, social hierarchies are in place even at work. The assistant general manager, the senior manager, the manager, and the two deputy managers have individual chambers with a name plate outside the door that carries their name and designation (along with grade). However, the AGM's nameplate is written on brass (to suggest hierarchy) (see Fig. 4a). For the rest of the employees belonging to

the Corporate Communication department, individual tables with chairs are arranged in two big rooms, wherein, four to five members are seated in a random fashion (see Fig. 4b).

Figure 4a: The individual rooms of the managerial level members (assistant general manager and manager respectively) of the CC dept, RINL-VSP; the AGM having a brass name plate (Source: Researcher's file)
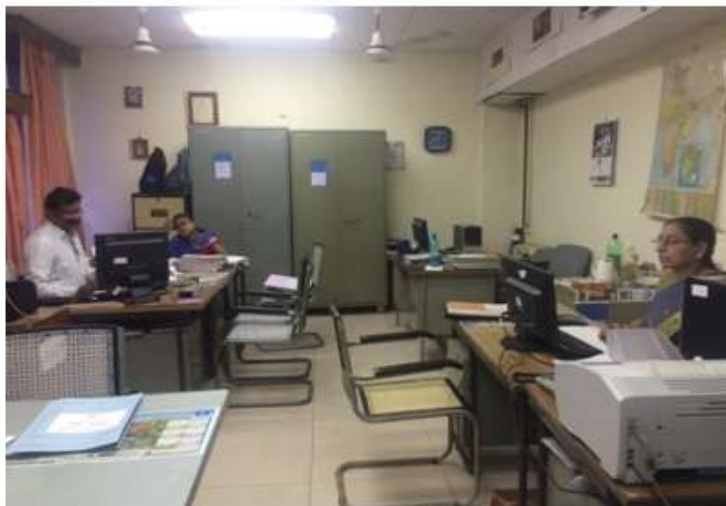

Figure 4b: A common room for the front-level managers, CC dept., RINL-VSP (Source: Researcher's file)

The office setup of the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP reflects the cultural themes of individuality, commonality, and high-power distance. This is because, India is a mix of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures, resulting in high-context and low-context communication.

The fact that India was ruled by the British for more than 200 years has given rise to the low-context communication culture, where space is compartmentalized and privately owned. Also, walled offices uphold the honour of space and privacy than a desk in a common area, another reflection of the individualistic

British culture on India. In addition, the use of individualized offices with a name plate by the senior members of the Corporate Communication department means that a position of importance and status is assigned to these professionals (see Fig. 4a). Thus, the office setup of the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP is a fine example of how status is attributed to space (proxemics), a nonverbal cue.

Also, the spatial arrangement of the front-level employees in large rooms (see Fig. 4b) signifies that India is a communitarian culture, where space is common, as a result of which people stand close to each other and share the same space. In India, a number of socio-economic factors have created a situation of interdependence which makes Indians behave in a collective fashion. One such factor is their family-centric nature (Lewis, 1999; Verghese, 2012); in an Indian family, collective behaviours are accompanied by shared needs and values, sensitivity to each other, and desire to maintain reciprocal affectivity. Such a scenario, with separate rooms for senior members and one to two large rooms for the remaining employees is also largely because of the high-power distance culture of India (Hofstede, 1980).

Namaste (Kinesics)

In India too, culture is the determining factor in everyday communication with well-established rules for social behaviour. For example, the traditional namaste[9] is a respectful form of greeting in India, and forms an important nonverbal gesture (kinesics) of the Indian etiquette. It is generally used both for welcome and leave-taking. Also, it is used for acknowledging and welcoming a relative, guest, or stranger. It is used for bidding goodbye to them as well. In some contexts, namaste is used to express gratitude for the assistance offered, or to thank the other person for his or her act of generosity.

However, educated men and women prefer to shake hands at the outset of every social encounter, suggesting instances of touch (haptics) as a form of communication. Handshakes in India are a result of the influence of British culture. In India, firm handshakes[10] using the right hand are a well-known etiquette for greetings, agreements, and farewells that display interpersonal liking. In addition, the handshake is commonly done upon meeting, offering congratulations, expressing gratitude, or completing an agreement. In India, the handshake has thus become the most common way of greeting each other welcome and goodbye.

In India, the traditional namaste and the handshake are the social codes of behaviour at work place too, as found by the researcher. However, during the researcher's face-to-face meetings with the corporate communication professionals of RINL-VSP, she was always greeted and bid farewell with a short and firm handshake. At times, the namaste was also exchanged. For instance, the researcher used namaste to express her gratitude towards the corporate communication professionals of RINL-VSP for their time and support, which was reciprocated in a similar fashion (see Fig. 5).

Figure 5: The traditional namaste exchange between the researcher and the in-charge of media relations, RINL- VSP

The use of the traditional namaste even today shows that the legacy of Hinduism is very clear in India. The namaste is predominately a Hindu custom, and in Hinduism, namaste means "I bow to the divine in you" (Lawrence, 2007). Dharma, the Hindu ethics, describes the specific rules to behave and the use of namaste exemplifies the proper social conduct as prescribed in the Dharma. Likewise, in India, handshake is an inheritance of British culture, and its very purpose is to convey trust, respect, and mutual harmony.

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[9] The folded hands are placed below the chin, in front of the chest, and accompanied with a slight bow.

[10] A handshake is a short ritual in which two people grasp one of each other's like hands, in most cases accompanied by a brief up and down movement of the grasped hands.

Moreover, in the Indian organizational environment, people are used to a system of hierarchy. This is because, the Indian society entails a strong appreciation to hierarchy due to its high-power distance culture. Since hierarchy is an indispensible factor in maintaining the Indian organizational structure, a person with higher rank in the organization is always obeyed and respected. In the Indian organizations, including RINL-VSP, one can observe the junior members giving respect to the seniors by saying *namaste* first, or offering the handshake first, and thus display their loyalty to their seniors in the organization. This further proves that Indians are very sensitive to the rank/position of people, and such awareness shapes their behaviour towards it. Besides, the harmony of the Indian society is based on maintaining the order of social status.

Business cards (Artefacts)

Coming to the business card culture in India, it is typically not an Indian culture, although the culture is increasingly becoming popular. In India, business cards, also known as "visiting cards", are always exchanged using the right hand, unlike the use of both hands in Japan. Further, the business card is presented with the writing facing the recipient. Since mutual respect is a common phenomenon in Asian countries like India, one should take time to read his / her business partner's card rather than stuffing it directly in the pocket. After the initial handshake and greeting, on the researcher's request, B.S.Satyendra, assistant general manager of RINL-VSP, handed over his business card to her.

India is a high-context communication culture with certain individualistic, low-context cultural traits and the business card is a perfect example of this. As in any high-context culture, even in India, the business cards embody information about the individual that further reflects the culture inherent in the society. In Indian organizations, business cards are held by people who belong exclusively to the senior management level. For example, in all the departments of RINL-VSP, including the Corporate Communication department, business cards are held by AGM (assistant general manager) rank people and above (see Fig. 6a). Hence, in India, the business card is senior-level person's introduction, and it tells the other party, the seniority of the individual in the organization, as per which social behaviours are maintained. The business card culture in India thus highlights the hierarchy system, which decides which person one is going to be speaking to from the Indian organization. Also, in a collectivistic and hierarchical culture like India, the business cards are an indicator of status and social identity. For example, the professional titles and the educational degrees on the card are reflective of status. The use of right hand by Indians and the careful placement of card in the shirt or trouser pocket or wallet represent the respect given to it by the recipient. Moreover, although separate card boxes are used for keeping the business cards, at times, the business cards, that are usually white in colour, with a standard size of 3.5 * 2 inches, are kept in the purse/wallet for future use and reference.

The business cards in India are usually in English and printed only on one side. The other side may be printed in Hindi, the national language of India. The individual's name, rank/title, and education qualification generally precede the name of the organization (see Fig. 6b). This reflects the influence of the low-context, individualistic traits of the British culture on India, where individual accomplishments weigh more than the collectivistic goals. Thus, in the Indian business culture, the business card is a representation of the individual, and his or her individual achievements.
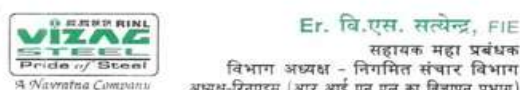
Figure 6: Indian business card. a) Business card of the assistant manager of the Corporate Communication dept., RINL-VSP b) Business card of a press person in India (Source: Researcher's file).

Clothing (Physical attire)

In terms of clothing, there is no specific dress code for the organizational members in India that suggest group identity and affiliation, unity, and cohesion. For example, in RINL-VSP, as observed by the researcher, both western style and traditional Indian clothes are worn by the corporate communication professionals; in the sense, in the workplace, there is no uniform dress code. Men usually wear formal or informal shirts and trousers, mostly without a tie, while women professionals prefer the traditional Indian sari / salwar-suit. This is because, given the apparent cultural heterogeneity and individualistic nature of Indians, one can safely assume that they do not conform themselves to a standard dress code / uniform in the organizational milieu (see Fig. 7).

Figure 7: The clothing of the CC professionals, RINL-VSP, India (Source: Researcher's file).

6. Conclusion

Since no two cultures are the same, nonverbal communication and its interpretation vary from culture to culture and understanding the influence of culture on communication is an essential part of learning to communicate across cultures. The present research study discusses the influence of culture on the nonverbal communication practices of the corporate communication department of Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan and RINL-VSP, India. The nonverbal communication included in the present research study is proxemics (space), kinesics (gestures), haptics (touch), physical artefacts, and physical attire.

As organizations are a part of societal culture, communication of an organization takes place within the value system of the society, and through the verbal and nonverbal practices, an organization maintains contact with its publics. Verbal and nonverbal practices of an organization are also the means through which the culture of an organization is reflected.

Context is important for communication to take place. There are various contexts, of which, cultural context is one. Now depending on the cultural context, some societies, and thereby its organizations prefer the nonverbal communication cues, while others prefer the verbal communication elements. High-context cultures prefer nonverbal communication, whereas low-context cultures actively choose the verbal communication cues.

Japan is a high-context communication culture that is collectivistic and is high on power distance. Cultural factors like history (Tokugawa and Meiji era) and religion (Confucianism and Zen Buddhism) has brought about a communication culture that is homogeneous, high-context, group oriented, and hierarchical. For instance, the corporate communication professionals of the Publicity Group[11], Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan, sit in a common workspace in a hierarchical fashion from the general manager to the office assistant suggesting core Japanese values such as group harmony and interdependence. This arrangement also facilitates face-to-face communication that promotes long-term relationships. They also have specialized behaviour patterns that is formal and ritualized like the bow, the *meishi* (business cards), the conservative dress styles that suggest Japan's core values like collectivism, group conformity, respect for authority, hierarchy, social status, saving face, harmony, and attention to relationship building.

On the other hand, India too is a collectivistic culture with high-power distance nature. However, India also exhibits individualistic traits because of colonization and the western influence. Therefore, India exhibits dual characteristics – high and low context cultural features in communication. Factors like family, religion (multi-religious with majority following Hinduism), and history (British colonialism) has brought about a communication culture that is heterogeneous, collectivistic / individualistic, high-low-context, and hierarchical. In the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP, India, the communication practices such as the *namaste* and handshake, the use of visiting / business cards, and nonconformity to a dress code suggest the core Indian values like mutual harmony, respect, social status and identity, heterogeneity, and hierarchy. Also, in the Corporate Communication department of RINL-VSP, the senior and middle-level management employees have individual rooms with a name plate, and the rest of the employees (front-level managers) share a common area highlighting the cultural themes of individuality and commonality.

Thus, culture defines nonverbal communication in both organizations from Japan and India.

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[11] The corporate communication department of Kobe Steel, Ltd., Japan is known as the Publicity Group.

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