

GLOBAL POSITIONING: Negotiating in the *Post-Global* World

by Dean Foster

Just a few years ago, it seemed as if professionals in the cross-cultural advisement field were raising their glasses in celebration. After years of spreading the gospel, the word was out and accepted: working, studying or just plain traveling beyond one's borders required an expectation for and an understanding of behaviors that would be different from those encountered at home. In short, culture mattered. And in just about every area of human activity, if it crossed cultures, it seemed that cultural differences had to be factored into the equation, as a new and vital consideration for success. This, of course, included the process of negotiating: no longer could we seek objective truths about good and bad negotiating in a cultural vacuum, for once we negotiated across cultures, cultural differences would certainly affect those truths. Recognizing the different ways that different cultures negotiated became an important global skill.

In just a few short years, however, globalization has so challenged the relevance of culture that its role is again being questioned, albeit for new and different reasons. If we are all speaking English, more or less, does culture matter? If we are all doing business by a global set of rules, more or less, does culture matter? If global corporate culture is in fact more powerful than local national culture, does culture matter? Predictably, the old questions regarding cross-cultural negotiations have also re-surfaced: do cultural differences really matter when negotiating in a world already so globally interconnected? Do cultural differences really affect the processes of negotiations? Has the mantra of multiculturalism receded to just a dull background drone in the face of what really goes on at the global negotiating table?

From Newton to Einstein

Let's get in a time machine and travel not too far back to a world where the concept of investigating "negotiations" was a new idea. This was a world premised on enlightened scientific rationalism, where we could hope to investigate a concern like negotiating, and expect our efforts to yield certain principles, methods or laws about what

works and what doesn't when human beings negotiate. Significant scientific research, in fact, did produce some very valuable principles, laws and methods, in regard to effective and ineffective negotiating, and something of a science of negotiating came into being. However, in many ways, this research mirrored its time, with the end-product being "universals" about negotiating which were true only to a point, that point being the "real world" of multiculturalism.

Suddenly, these "truths" about negotiating, when applied cross-culturally, had to be adjusted, for what may have been true in the culture in which they were researched, was no longer the case when moved abroad. This pre-global world of categories, principles and laws unaffected by cultural differences now had to become, in the multicultural global world, more like guiding frameworks or perspectives from which to look at negotiating, but which needed to be bent, changed, re-defined, from time to time and place to place, depending upon the actual people involved. The scientific investigation of negotiating moved from an attempt to discover a perfect mechanistic set of truths to accepting the messy notion of cultural relativism: in short, it moved from a Newtonian pre-global world to a global Einsteinian world where culture made all the former rules relative.

The Original Ten Commandments

So what were those seminal scientific negotiating truths? And how did we have to adjust them according to cultural requirements? For starters, we learned that there were essential elements to the process of negotiating: all negotiations, for example, involved considering the following elements:

- *values*: these are non-negotiable beliefs, often used as justifications for one's position, and they must be understood, respected, and deflected, in order to focus on the priority needs at the table.
- *Positions*: these are typically the stated objectives of one side; they may or may not reflect priority interests.
- *underlying priority needs*: these are often the true requirements that one side has, but may or may not be put forward clearly or immediately.

- *a requirement for re-framing*: almost all negotiations must be reframed away from values and positions to underlying priority needs, in order for success to be perceived by both sides.
- *a search for alternative solutions*: this is the creative problem-solving process that is the hallmark of a successful negotiation.

Additionally, most all negotiations apparently move through several stages, beginning with:

- *ritual-sharing*: a period of relationship-building, where substantive issues are typically not brought forward.
- *Positioning*: typically that time in a negotiation where positions are revealed and challenged.
- *problem-solving*: typically the end of the negotiation where objections to positions and values are overcome and a search for the satisfaction of priority needs occurs.

And finally, all negotiations generally occur within a climate that is either *collaborative (win-win)* or *competitive (win/lose)*.

Skilled negotiators master a set of behaviors that allows them to skillfully manage all of these elements to their advantage, while novice negotiators, or those unaware of these issues, tend to be less successful at the negotiating table, because they are less skilled at understanding and managing these issues.

Enter the Cultural Anthropologists

And what were the cultural considerations that had to be factored into the negotiations equation once the scientific research met the global world?

Essentially, that values were often culturally based, that culture affected the degree to which negotiators would put forward positions or reveal underlying needs, that certain cultures were more or less pre-disposed or not to search for alternative solutions, that the speed and degree to which negotiations moved through their particular stages was also highly dependent upon culture. Perhaps most importantly, we learned that culture played a significant role in determining whether or not the negotiation would proceed in a collaborative or competitive climate, and whether the expected outcome would be

win/win or win/lose. These differences were the result of the influence of cultural values, which cultural anthropologists categorized as follows:

- *Status/hierarchy vs equality orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in organization and structure or efficiency and access
- *Individualistic vs other-dependent orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in independent action or group consensus
- *Relationship vs rule orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in personal relationships or the universal application of rules
- *Monochronic vs polychronic time orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in organizing and compartmentalizing time and activity or not
- *Risk-comfort vs risk-avoidant orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in taking risk or moving cautiously
- *Past vs future orientation:* the degree to which a culture would emphasize past accomplishments or future possibilities
- *High vs low context orientation:* the degree to which a culture saw greater value in communicating implicitly or explicitly
- *Process vs results orientation:* the degree to which a culture emphasized detail and process or end result
- *Formal vs informal orientation:* the degree to which a culture valued protocols and formalities or not

At the negotiating table, this meant that we saw culture's influence on the negotiation process specifically in a number of areas:

- *The Basic Concept of the Negotiation:* Win/lose? Win/win? Collaborative or Competitive? This set the tone and affects the climate, and the degree to which the climate can be changed or not.
- *The Selection of the Negotiators:* Based on what criteria? Status? Gender or age? Rank? Family association? Or competency, previous experience or qualifications?

- *The Importance of Protocol:* What traditions and customs do we need to follow? How do we greet each other? Where do we sit? Do we negotiate over meals?
- *The Style of Communications:* Is non-verbal important? How do we confirm understanding? How do we communicate disagreement?
- *The Value of Time:* Is time manipulated? Is an agenda iron-clad? Do meetings start and end “on time”? How long should the negotiation take?
- *Risk-taking propensity:* Who can say what and to whom and when? How much information needs to be shared and with whom before progress is made?
- *Decision-making:* Is it done by a group or by an individual? Do we need total consensus? Majority? Who makes the decision, an individual, or several people? Are all the decision-makers at the table?
- *The Final Nature of the Agreement:* Is it a legal tome? A short memorandum of understanding? Or is it a handshake?

Of Icebergs and Solar Winds

But the time machine does not stop here. If the *global* world added the factor of cultural relativism to the *pre-global* world’s analysis of the process of negotiation, what happens to the equation when we enter the *post-global* world of today? Today, in addition to considering culture, we must add a third factor to the equation, that being the *forces of globalization*, which powerfully affect our behaviors, including those at the negotiation table. Today, these profound, universal forces of globalization affect not only the traditional elements of negotiating, but the degree and ways in which cultures also affect the process. In this new *post-global* world, we must understand not only the Newtonian mechanics of negotiation, and the Einsteinian relativity of cultures, but the environment of quantum forces in which this is occurring.

Admittedly, the equation is getting complex, so perhaps updating some useful models could be helpful. A traditional model of culture has been to visualize culture as

an “iceberg”, where the tip of the iceberg – the small perceivable part – is tiny (about 10%) – when compared with the larger (about 90%) invisible part. The visible tip above the surface represents the visible behaviors we demonstrate to each other, including those at the negotiation table; the invisible bulk of the iceberg, hidden under the surface, represents the deeper values, belief systems, traditions and ultimately history, that drive the visible behaviors we see. At the negotiation table, the visible behaviors we reveal to each other around the elements, stages and climate of a negotiation are often the result of deeper cultural values that are hidden from view. Fair enough, as far as it goes.

However, in a global world, all the icebergs floating around in the global sea are now impacted by universal forces of globalization, which may be represented by the sun. These forces of globalization include global multinational corporate behaviors and values, technology, mass transportation, mass migration, the fall of national boundaries, the establishment of regional trade zones, the globalization of mass culture and English, etc. When these forces impact individual cultures, when the sun shines on the various cultural icebergs floating in today’s world, several phenomena occur:

- the visible tips change first; melting (or melding of cultures) at the deeper levels takes much longer, and traditional values stay frozen a very long time.
- Superficial change at the visible level seems to be the same, while frozen values under the surface remain different, increasing the disparity between visible behavior and underlying values.
- As icebergs melt, hidden deeper values under the surface rise to the surface, become exposed, and increase in their visibility.
- As icebergs melt, the attributes of one flow into another, albeit slowly, and in unidentifiable ways.

Successful negotiating in today’s post-global world requires that we understand the impact that these post-global phenomena have on culture, just as we have had to consider culture’s impact on the original investigation in the global world. Forces of globalization have changed the nature of culture’s impact on negotiation behaviors, in identifiable ways.

Of Stereotypes and Archetypes

Culture in the pre-global world had four defining characteristics:

1. any particular culture's attributes were easily stereotyped,
2. these attributes were bound to the cultures in which they originated,
3. these attributes were discreet and independent of the outside world, and...
4. these attributes were used to define what made its people different from others.

The post-global world has turned these four defining characteristics of culture on their head:

1. any particular culture's attributes are archetypal, not stereotypical (that is, they represent human behaviors that are possible anywhere)
2. these attributes are independent of the cultures in which they originated (that is, they can easily be found in many different cultures),
3. these attributes are wholly dependent upon the outside world for their nature and their survival, and ...
4. these attributes become a primary way to people of different cultures together.

Globalization, therefore, has not made cultural difference irrelevant, or diminished its impact or importance, but it has changed how cultural differences need to be considered. Rather than reducing or minimizing their relevance, globalization, as we saw in the iceberg, in fact, raises deep cultural differences to a level of awareness, while making it appear as if similarities are developing at a superficial level. The disparity between apparent homogenization on the surface and severe differences rising from below can result in situations of extreme culture clash and dislocation.

Toward A More Complex Equation

At the negotiating table, the skilled post-global negotiator needs to manage this quantum environment where cultural attributes may be rising and falling at the same time, in various degrees, depending upon the cultures represented at the table. Skilled post-global

negotiators must not only be able to recognize, respect and manage the cultural differences at the table, but must also be able to re-frame cultural differences into behavioral options that the other side may not have previously known, but which can satisfy their priority needs in new and different ways. Most importantly, skilled post-global negotiators have to master all three factors in the post-global negotiation equation, in order to be successful in this quantum, post-global world.