



Intercultural Communication in Hospitality

Week 4

Why intercultural communication matters in hospitality

- ▶ Hospitality = human interaction across cultures
- ▶ Miscommunication → guest dissatisfaction, conflict, reputational damage
- ▶ Effective communication → trust, repeat business, stronger guest loyalty
- ▶ In global tourism hubs, staff often serve guests from dozens of cultural backgrounds daily



The role of culture in communication

- ▶ Culture shapes how people encode and decode messages
- ▶ Key dimensions
 - ▶ **Language** (spoken, written, symbolic)
 - ▶ **Non-verbal cues** (gestures, eye contact, personal space)
 - ▶ **Context** (high-context vs. low-context communication)
 - ▶ **Values and norms** (hierarchy, politeness, time orientation)

Theories of intercultural communication - an overview

- ▶ Hofstede's cultural dimensions
- ▶ Hall's High- and Low-context cultures
- ▶ Communication Accommodation Theory
- ▶ Face-Negotiation theory
- ▶ Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory



Hofstede's cultural dimensions

- ▶ Power distance - affects how staff address guests (formal vs. informal)
- ▶ Individualism vs. Collectivism - affects guest expectations (individual vs. group service)
- ▶ Uncertainty avoidance - influences willingness to try new experiences
- ▶ Masculinity vs. Femininity - affects service emphasis (competition vs. cooperation)
- ▶ Long-term vs. Short-Term Orientation - impacts repeat loyalty
- ▶ Indulgence vs. Restraint - shapes leisure behavior

Hall's High- and Low-context cultures

- ▶ **High-context** - meaning inferred from context, relationships, non-verbal cues (e.g., Japan, Uganda)
- ▶ **Low-context** - meaning in explicit, direct words (e.g., USA, Germany)
- ▶ Impact in hospitality
 - ▶ Guest requests may be subtle (high-context) vs. direct (low-context)
 - ▶ Staff training must address both styles

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

- ▶ People adjust speech, tone, gestures to match or diverge from others
- ▶ **Convergence** - adopting guest's style to build rapport
- ▶ **Divergence** - emphasizing one's own cultural identity
- ▶ Hospitality impact
 - ▶ Convergence improves guest satisfaction
 - ▶ Over-accommodation may appear patronizing

Face-Negotiation Theory

- ▶ “Face” = a person’s social self-image
- ▶ Cultures differ
 - ▶ Individualist → self-face (protect personal dignity)
 - ▶ Collectivist → other-face (protect group harmony)
- ▶ Hospitality impact - how complaints are expressed and handled

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory

- ▶ Intercultural encounters often cause anxiety & uncertainty
- ▶ Successful communication requires
 - ▶ Knowledge of cultural norms
 - ▶ Empathy
 - ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Hospitality role - pre-arrival information, clear signage, multilingual staff

Verbal communication in hospitality

- ▶ Language barriers → misunderstandings
- ▶ Use of translation tools, multilingual signage, language training
- ▶ Politeness strategies vary by culture
- ▶ Tone and formality critical



Non-verbal communication in hospitality

- ▶ Body language - gestures, eye contact, touch, posture
- ▶ Proxemics - personal space expectations
- ▶ Time orientation - punctuality vs. flexibility
- ▶ Dress and grooming as non-verbal messages



Practical strategies for managers

- ▶ Recruit and train diverse staff
- ▶ Cross-cultural communication workshops
- ▶ Use visual aids and simplified English/language
- ▶ Encourage cultural awareness and empathy
- ▶ Develop multilingual materials (menus, brochures, websites)

PEEL, PEEL, PEEL

How do cultural differences shape guest-staff interactions in hospitality?

- ▶ Expectations of service
- ▶ Communication styles
- ▶ Perceptions of service quality

How do non-verbal communication differences influence guest-staff interactions in hospitality?

- ▶ service delivery slows down
- ▶ can cause tension
- ▶ guest dissatisfaction
- ▶ misinterpretation of intentions

How can misinterpretations of cultural communication styles create service challenges in hospitality?

How does cultural background shape perceptions of excellent service in hospitality?