# Cases for Small Group Discussion

**Case 11–1. Intercultural Business Communication and Technology**

Bryan Kilter opened the e-mail from his Chinese supplier. It seemed to be a request to alter some of the garment patterns currently in Kilter Fashions’s standard inventory items. Bryan was becoming overwhelmed with his relationship with the Chinese garment manufacturer.

He did not speak Chinese, and the supplier did not speak English, so they both depended on software translation when they exchanged messages. This particular e-mail read: “Sweetheart Bryan, The dress have cheap wide contraction joints in the seams, if you get the goods to wear inappropriate, you can own in a local sewing shop click on it. The Costs need to accept yourself, Hope you can understanding us. Approve changes please don’t correspond by click here.”

The e-mail had just come in, so Bryan quickly typed a reply: “Hello, Chin Lee. Are you saying that the new design will have an elastic panel in the sides, so that it will be easier to fit without alterations? I think I understand that the dress will cost $.70 more now. Please let me know if I understand you correctly. Thanks.”

Bryan went back to work on the end-of-month inventory. Before five minutes had gone by, he received a reply from Chin Lee: “Sweetheart Bryan, The seams wear inappropriate for contraction joints, why not question your meaning. Your own construction technician able to do construct. OK?”

Bryan scratched his head in bewilderment.

**Case 11-1 Questions**

1. *What challenges in conducting business across cultural divides does this case demonstrate?*

This case demonstrates the inadequacy of translation software that multinational companies often depend on. Literal translations miss nuances of slang and conversational language. Meaning is often ambiguous and may result in business decisions that are costly. Negative effects of misunderstandings during translation also include the impact on work relationships.

*2. What, specifically, would you suggest to Bryan as the next step?*

Clearly a translator fluent in both languages is needed. Multinational organizations typically have such resources available. It is imperative that Bryan obtains accurate information before proceeding further with his supplier.

**Case 11-2. Preparing for Sonora**

You are a human resources training specialist working for a large automaker. Your company will soon complete construction of a plant in Sonora, Mexico. This plant will specialize in the production of your very popular subcompact, the Chaperone.

Initially, all the new plant’s management will be transferred from various locations in the United States. Later, supervisors will be promoted from the ranks of the Mexican nationals hired to work on the production line. It is hoped that many of these supervisors will eventually rise to the ranks of at least middle management.

The company now faces a twofold problem, however. First, it needs to identify the criteria used to select the managers who are going to be transferred from the United States to the Sonora plant. Second, it needs to train them to function in a different culture.

Because you earned an international business certificate along with your degree in human resources management, your boss has decided that this job is right for you. She believes this to be true even though your familiarity with Mexico is limited to two coastal vacations there three and four years ago.

She wants a three-page proposal, in memo form, on her desk in two days. The first page should cover the criteria to be used in selecting the managers to be sent to Sonora. She notes that you needn’t bother with their technical expertise. Others will screen the candidates on that basis. You should instead focus on the qualifications they should have to be good intercultural managers and communicators and how the company should assess those qualifications.

The remaining two pages of the memo should outline the training program through which the transferees would go. This program will have to cover, at a minimum, language training, the larger cultural variations, nonverbal sensitivity, managerial philosophies, and organizational cultures in the two countries.

**Case 11-2 Project**

*Write a memo that will establish the foundation for success in this international venture. Your selection criteria should single out the candidates with the greatest potential for success. Your training program should then ensure the likelihood that they will achieve that success.*

First, you will need individuals who have a good knowledge of the Spanish language as it is spoken in Mexico, not as it is spoken in Spain. Possible candidates would need to know Mexican business customs such as hours, attire, greetings, posture, proximity, and other nonverbal communication behavior expected in business settings

Second, candidates should know local business laws concerning bribery, female and minority employees, hiring practices, import and export laws, management styles, and typical wages for the positions for which they would be hiring.

Third, the candidates should gain expertise in daily living practices: how to order from a menu, what foods are popular, what seating is appropriate, and when and how much to tip. They would need to know whether or not to give gifts, and under what conditions. Knowledge of appropriate topics for polite conversation and aspects of popular culture such as professional sports and religious holidays would help smooth their way.

**Case 11-3. Tsunami Relief**

A $245 million stretch of blacktop intended to be the signature goodwill gesture from the American people to the Indonesian survivors of the 2004 tsunami instead became a parable of the problems of Aceh Provinces recovery.

Construction of the 150-mile road along the devastated coast never started, stalled by a host of obstacles like acquiring rights of way through residential and farmland and, particularly, through several hundred graves of mystical and religious significance.

Though some villagers welcomed the idea, some had reservations about a US-style thoroughfare with a wide shoulder on either side that would replace the existing ribbon of mostly churned dirt and mud. Villagers said they feared speeding traffic—they threw rocks at fast-traveling cars of foreign aid workers—and wanted to be able to sell snacks and tea from stalls snug by the roadside, as they had always done.

A demonstration outside the main Indonesian reconstruction agency turned violent when protesters complained that they still lacked basic services and demanded more financing for education.

The patience of US officials wore thin too. They complained that the government had been too slow in buying up the land and resolving the issue of graves. Finally, the Americans had become so disconcerted about delays that they had tried to pry more action from the Indonesians by suggesting that the money for the road would be diverted to the reconstruction efforts in Lebanon.

“It was threatened they would take the money away,” said Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, the director of the Indonesian rehabilitation and reconstruction agency in Aceh. “That’s standard.”

The Indonesians said the Americans were imposing First World standards of efficiency on a poor region that was pounded by civil war and then swamped by the tsunami, which killed more than 100,000. Records of land titles were washed away, and questions of inheritance among devastated families take a while to answer.

The idea for the road evolved soon after the tsunami when the Bush administration wanted to show that the United States cared about Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim country, in its moment of need.

It was decided early on to finance one substantial project rather than a number of smaller ones. At first, rebuilding a significant portion of the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, into a kind of “signature city” was discussed. Instead, a well-engineered road from the capital to Meulaboh, the southernmost coastal town, which was nearly completely wiped out, was considered a more fruitful project that played to the American strength of fast and modern construction. The new road would connect the poor fishing communities of the wasted west coast of Aceh to the outside world.

Case 11-3 Questions

1. *Identify the cultural values that are clashing in this case.*

US cultural values are readily distinguished in this response to the crisis. The United States values a rapid response to a crisis, liberal expenditures of funds to relieve suffering, and a strong belief in the importance of infrastructure for population mobility. Clearly, the Indonesians do not share these values. Instead, they value slow deliberation, maintenance of the status quo and tradition, and family authority in decisions. The US trait of impatience is also readily apparent by its imposed deadline and its threat to remove the offer of monetary aid if the Indonesians do not act quickly.

1. *Which dimensions of cultural differences in Hofstede’s model are relevant to this* *case?*

* Collectivism vs. Individualism
* Monochronic vs. Polychronic Time
* High vs. Low Uncertainty Avoidance