



Website context: Learning from internationalisation → Overseas Campuses

Cultural differences and time (Hall, 1976ⁱ in Kenton and Valentine, 1997ⁱⁱ)
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Overview

According to H T Hall (1914-2009) anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, we communicate using a wide range of behaviours that are often unexamined or taken for granted. Hall's work indicated that people influenced by the Western European heritage tend to live in a "word world" and are often unconscious of the extent to which the language of behaviour influences communication. He developed a conceptual framework of "space and time" orientation which may be useful in understanding communication differences between cultures and individuals. This paper focuses on the time component of this framework and looks at different ways of thinking about time and in addition, makes use of "generation theory" (Strauss and Howe 1991ⁱⁱⁱ) to consider how different generations are influenced and affected by one another.

Monochronic (Linear) time orientation and Polychronic (circular) orientation

According to Hall (1959)^{iv} "Polychrons" make use of "Polychronic" time (or P-Time) when two or more activities are carried out in the same time period (or clock block). "Monochrons", making use of "monochronistic" time (or M-Time) approach time as linear, tangible, and divisible into blocks. For monochrons, time is concerned with planning and usually invests significant energy into the maintenance of established schedules. By contrast, polychronic time use occurs when multiple tasks are carried out in the same time period and switching between activities can be both desirable and productive.

Cultures also have different ways of organising and using time, although it would be misleading to think that a culture is entirely one or the other. All cultures express both orientations. Monochronistic cultures are 'doing'-orientated, polychronistic cultures are 'being'-orientated. Polychronic cultures view Monochronic cultures as sterile and as showing little concern for the human condition because of its emphasis on limits, linearity and inflexibility. Monochronic cultures find Polychronic cultures unproductive and illogical. This is reflected in the table below:

Monochronic (Linear) Time Orientation	Polychronic (Circular) Time Orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views time as an entity to be saved, spent, or lost. • Completes one task before starting another. • Focuses on the task to be completed within a certain time frame. • Separates work from family and social life. • Seeks to maintain rigid appointment schedule. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views time as fluid, flexible. • Works on multiple tasks before finishing any one. • Focuses on and nurtures the relationships represented by the tasks. • Views work, family and social life as one. • Reacts as the day's events evolve.

The implications of this are important for cross cultural communication. Individuals with a monochronistic orientation perceived to be cold and distant by polychrons, may become frustrated with those with a polychronistic orientation who appear to have difficulty scheduling meetings. Polychrons become equally frustrated with the monochron's apparent lack of sensitivity in having no time to exchange informalities and stories and seem over-focussed on the task in hand.

IMMEDIACY and CONNECTIVITY

The Millennial Generation, or Generation Y (Howe and Strauss 2000^v), those born after 1980 have now reached Higher Education. They were the first generation for whom new technologies did not represent a departure from a previous way of life, and these technologies have shaped Generation Y with respect to how they interact with other people and with information. This is the 'connected' generation, always in contact with one another and the world around them, which in turn has led to an unprecedented 'capacity for the instantaneous' (Nimon:2^{vi}). The mobile is more than a phone: it is a device through which they "flirt, work, socialise and express their personality" (Huntley 2006^{vii}). Such connectivity is leading to a number of key characteristics of the Millennial Generation in terms of how they relate to society.

Opportunity/reality of Y Generation world	Result
Connectivity	Expects 'immediacy' Bonding with peers rather than family; tribal mentality: group takes precedence rather than the individual.
Global village -access not only to the international but also the global	Used to a world of uncertainty and impermanence.
Growing sense of transience	Focus on mobility: Millennials are unlikely to stay with any one employer long. Expect immediacy.

According to Nimon (2005:3) the immediacy of the millennial world has a potentially significant impact on higher education institutions. Some of this is reflected in the table below:

Implications of 'connectivity and immediacy' for Higher Education

Presenting behaviour or situation	Impact and expectations
Academics providing an email address.	May create expectations of instantaneous responses.
Offering 'timely' response.	Misunderstanding of what 'timely' means - unreasonable expectations
Offering 24-hour online access.	May be interpreted for all services.
Routine collection of data from students.	Precedent for immediate feedback.
Everyone is contactable; punctuality sometimes not valued.	Short-term commitment rather than long-term commitment preferred.
Internet primary source of information which is often not-, or poorly referenced.	Confusion about intellectual property ownership.
Constant emphasis on health and safety or always rescued.	Decreased emphasis on risk, creativity and imagination.
Praise for everything, emphasis on strong self esteem; raised in a	Little opportunity to benchmark, or measuring themselves against others;

competition-free environment.	Expectations that everything deserves to pass.
Used to having input into decisions that affect them.	Unlikely to accept academic decision on basis of 'rules' - has to see relevance. Extremely strategic - must see the point.

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November 2009

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- ⁱ Hall, E. T. (1976) *Beyond Culture*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- ⁱⁱ Kenton, S.B. and Valentine, D. (1997) *CrossTalk: Communicating in a Multicultural Workplace*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Strauss, W. and Howe, N. (1991) *Generations*. New York: William Morrow Publisher.
- ^{iv} Hall, E.T. (1959) *The Silent Language*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
- ^v Howe, N. and Strauss, W. (2000) *Millennials rising: The next generation*. New York: Vintage Books.
- ^{vi} Nimon, S. (2005) *Generation Y and Higher Education: The Other Y2K*. University of South Australia. <<http://www.aair.org.au/2006Papers/Nimon.pdf>> Accessed: 13 October 2009.
- ^{vii} Huntley, R. (2006) *The world according to Y: Inside the new adult generation*. Crows Nest, N. Australia: Allen and Unwin.