
Your Pace or Mine? Culture, Time, and Negotiation

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This article explores the impact that different perceptions of time may have on cross-cultural negotiations. Beyond obvious issues of punctuality and timekeeping, differences may occur in the value placed on the uses of time and the priorities given to past, present, or future orientations. The role of time in negotiations involves two key dimensions: differing perceptions and values of time, and the management of time. Both dimensions, the author suggests, need to be on the negotiation table.

Time, Culture, and Perception

Time talks. It speaks more plainly than words. The message it conveys comes through loud and clear . . . It can shout the truth where words lie.

— *Edward Hall*

All practice creates time and the varying combinations of time within a social formation create a temporal structure or style. However, I believe that we should not merely say that social formations have their own temporal styles, but to go a step further and characterize social formations *primarily* in terms of their temporal styles of life (Gosden 1994: 187, emphasis added).

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Time was invented to stop everything from happening at once, Albert Einstein is reported to have said. Immanuel Kant saw time as a way of organizing experience. Time is said to be curved when contemplated at a very large scale. Time is given international accuracy and currency according to atomic clocks. For some, time is a commodity that is in limited supply and needs to be fully used; for others, it is less a commodity than an open opportunity. And time, in addition to its formal measurement of events from nanoseconds to eons, is a social construct having meaning and symbolic significance as much as it is a strict marker of the passage of events.

In this essay, I will explore cultural differences in both the *management* and *experience* of time (Brislin and Kim 2003), focusing on the many ways these differences can affect the negotiation process. This is clearly not all that there is to be said about our immersion in time and its likely impact on our relations with the world and with others. It goes well beyond the scope of this paper to even begin to explore the field of chronemics (although the article does touch on this field briefly below¹) or the many ways that disciplines as diverse as psychotherapy, phenomenology,² management theory,³ and theoretical physics⁴ have examined time. (In the field of dispute resolution in particular, some scholars have begun to draw on and apply the “mindfulness” traditions of Buddhism,⁵ examining how altering one’s stance toward presence, the present, and the narratives of events can affect the dispute resolution process.)

If any thematic unity of these perspectives on time is possible, it may turn on the relation — and tension — between both the synchronicity and the separation of events. Time, it seems, is a puzzle that has confounded thinkers of the stature of Kant and Carl Jung on epistemology; Ervin Lazlo and Humberto Maturana on systems theory; Einstein, David Bohm, and Wolfgang Pauli on physics and philosophy. At the heart of this puzzle lies the relationship between the *perception* and *reality* of time. Negotiators, particularly in intercultural settings, are well-advised to recognize the power of and the difference between their own perceptions of time and the perceptions of others.

Examinations of time, especially in studies focusing on business communication and negotiation, have tended to be limited to such issues as punctuality and the likely duration of meetings. Several studies of cultural difference and negotiation have acknowledged time as one dimension of difference, but few have explored it in the same depth as such features as “face” and identity, degrees of hierarchy, power distance, and the balance of individualism and collectivism. But given the extent to which time may shape process, relationships, and the substantive outcomes of negotiations, it may have an even more significant impact on negotiations than any of these other features.

Time itself can, indeed, be an implicit or unconscious source of conflict, and conflicts about time may themselves create the need for

negotiation or cause negotiations to fail. Conflicts may arise expressly about time and timing when parties have incompatible expectations about the “best use” of time, or about the importance of punctuality, or about how to run meetings efficiently. But as important as these tangible differences about time may be, the often unarticulated assumptions that underlie them — about building relationships, the connections between social and task-oriented activities, and the impact of history on current conflicts — may be even more significant.

Differing perceptions of time threaten intercultural interactions because they can lead us to attach judgments to time-related aspects of behavior. If people wear watches, then why cannot they arrive at meetings on time? Why do we spend so much time in meetings chatting about irrelevant topics such as our grandchildren? Will this meeting run late and cause me to miss my airplane flight if we continue in this manner? An awareness of time’s many dimensions and functions may not always eliminate the conflicts that time creates, but it could reduce the kind of judgmental thinking and behavior that can inhibit constructive negotiation relationships.

Experiencing Time and Its Conflicts

My interest in this topic was sparked by an incident that I witnessed in 2004 at an international student negotiation competition. In one round of that event, two teams of students from Asian nations and universities faced each other. All four students were of Asian origin.⁶ At the end of the negotiation, one of the judges, thoughtful and highly experienced in this competition, observed that he found it both pleasant and enlightening to observe the unusual way in which these four students went about their negotiation, how they devoted more time to establishing personal relationships with each other, how the process seemed more cordial and less adversarial than is typically the case. But, he asked, wasn’t this somehow less “efficient” a negotiation as a result?

The judge’s observations intrigued me. It was clear that these teams of Asian student negotiators were perceived as no less competent than other negotiators and that the outcome was seen to be just as balanced and enduring as other negotiation outcomes. But the students’ use of time, their “indirect” approach to getting to the nub of the negotiation, the care they took to ensure the security of the negotiation relationship, and their use of more elliptical language all appeared to contribute to a perceived inefficiency. However friendly the judge’s intentions, his comment nevertheless indicated both how perceptions of the “best use” of time in negotiations can differ significantly and how those unconscious perceptions on the conduct of negotiations can affect negotiations.

In 2003, while facilitating a training program in team building and conflict management for a group of Italian election monitors in Tuscany, I had

an opportunity to witness how differing interpretations of punctuality can affect the negotiation process. Despite the keen desire of participants to learn as much as they could in a limited time, they consistently arrived for the start of workshops up to thirty minutes after the jointly agreed starting time. Such differences extended to decisions concerning after-hours activities. My colleague from New Zealand and I agreed — or thought we had agreed — that we would meet with the Italian participants for dinner; some negotiation ensued as to what that time might be, and, with the next day's work in prospect, we thought we had agreed on the “earlier” time of 8:30 P.M., which is somewhat early for dinner by Italian standards. Again, my colleague and I were the first to arrive by some thirty minutes, on each occasion. While this, in practice, was an unimportant gap in timing and it was one treated with great good humor and with references to “Kiwi time” and “Italian time,” it was intriguing in terms of the divergent expectations and assumptions it revealed.

It is tempting to reach some simple conclusion relating to the “Asian” preference for “indirectness” in the first example or the “Italian” casualness about punctuality in the second. But these are neither sufficiently empirical to stand as conclusions nor sufficiently useful to allow us to develop any responses.⁷ It is only in more recent research that we have come to understand that we and our Italian colleagues were negotiating about quite different matters: we were, or thought we were, negotiating literally about a *time* for meeting; our course participants were, or thought they were, negotiating about an *activity*: “dinner.”

Comments by the participants confirmed that they did not merely misunderstand or fail to hear the words “8:30.” Rather, this goes to the core of what is being invoked and understood by a time-related reference. We might readily attribute lack of punctuality to either a simple failure in communication or to some broadly drawn cultural characteristic. The point, to which I will return later and which I only came to understand some time after the event, is that while most of those with whom we deal are unlikely to have any difficulty in literally telling the time or knowing what “8:30” means, it is likely the *activity* to which the timing relates that carries a cultural meaning which we, as outsiders, do not immediately share. It is not a miscommunication in the sense of our not literally hearing each other about the time, but it is a misunderstanding about timing, when the activity itself, depending on the cultural context, carries a looser connotation. Understanding this difference allows us to avoid any conclusions that, say, Italians are less reliable timekeepers than others, and to understand that in some contexts, and for some people, the nature of an activity itself carries with it a meaning — and often a timing — that may be different than one's own.

One more example will suffice to provide the framework for the discussion that follows. Some readers may be familiar with the rise of the

“Slow Food Movement” (<http://www.slowfood.com>), which exemplifies both a resistance to perceived cultural invasion through global food chains as well as an embedded view of the link between time, quality of life, taste, and tradition. According to the movement’s stated aims as described on its web-site, the qualities of time and pace are intimately associated with protecting the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food. The focus is food, but the explicit and qualitative contrast is between “fast” and “slow” cultures. “Slow” is associated with conviviality, the protection of the environment and agriculture, and the preservation, or rediscovery, of taste. Time is quintessentially qualitative and substantive — and the basis for preferences. To that extent it is also firmly attached to the attributes of history and food. It is also interesting that, in one of the columns on that site, time (as in “slow” food) is associated with *identity* and, less surprisingly, *tradition*. Time is more than merely temporal: it is, for many, a mark of how we live. It is also, at least in this context, a mark of superiority: in the same way that one person might regard the indirect negotiation style of another culture as inefficient, the “slow food” avatars are likely to regard their passage of time over the dining table as more rewarding and probably more virtuous than that of the “food-to-go” people.

Finally, I will make some limited observations drawn from the field of chronemics, which is defined as “the study of temporal communication, including the way people organize and react to time.”⁸ First, a historical analysis of the changes in cultural and philosophical perceptions of time suggests there has been a shift from a view of time as objective, as something that happens to us or as an absolute, Newtonian framework in which all events happen. Instead, chronemics focuses on time as a dimension of consciousness, as a way of organizing experience, and as a core element of human communication that reflects the ways in which people perceive and respond to (and in) time. Viewed this way, time is not an objective context in which all events happen but is instead one way of organizing not just *events* but also *identities*.

Studies in chronemics reinforce intercultural studies that have found differences in the polychronic and monochronic perception and uses of time. A “polychronic” perception of time is one in which events are not sharply or sequentially distinguished and multiple events can be seen as happening at the same time. A “monochronic” perception is one that analytically separates and sequences events. The immediate implication is that time is not only a matter of how events are perceived, sequenced, and completed; it is also a matter of how people regard relationships across time.

Time may also be more generally associated with the degree to which a culture or society can be described as “slow” or “fast” (see also Levine and Norenzayan 1999) and is sometimes viewed as a commodity that some people have “more” of than others. Time may be compressed by greater

urgency of deadlines and obligations, thus, time and urgency have been associated more with individualistic societies in which the combination of fast pace and diminished social support is likely to contribute to higher levels of burnout and stress (see again Levine and Norenzayan 1999). Finally, time is typically organized according to different needs and contexts, all the more so in industrialized societies where clearer distinctions tend to be drawn between leisure time, formal or institutional time, and technical or scientific time.

Culture and Negotiation

It is tempting to reach generalized and familiar conclusions about cultures, especially cultures other than one's own. This can take on a larger sweep when we are not merely comparing one national group with another, but rather whole blocs of nations with each other — when, for example, we presume to talk of the impact of cultural characteristics of “the West” when negotiating in “Asia” and make an observation like this one: “The Western nation-state . . . with its emphasis on logic and the rational, contrasts with Asian states where the seemingly irrational often dominates, and where standards of law and religion are different” (Belbutowski 1996).

Not only does this kind of overgeneralizing confound culture with nationality and citizenship, but imposes on foreign cultures and nations a uniformity that people resist when such generalizations are applied to their own cultures. This kind of stereotyping can also lead one to measure the cultural practices of the other against our own, where *our* practice or belief becomes the norm, thus encouraging claims of cultural superiority. (This is one thing when stating a preference for a three-hour dinner over a hamburger, but quite another when asserting that that kind of difference somehow embodies the essence of cultural and national differences.) This is probably, at least informally, inevitable: as travelers and tourists we see the others' world through our own eyes.⁹ Obviously, the risks and implications become very serious, however, when perception turns to judgment and that judgment precipitates action, and we then seek to justify that action in terms of the simplicity, folly, or threat of the other's culture.¹⁰

In approaching the relationship between culture and negotiation, we are faced with several options. At one end of the scale is the view that negotiation is a universal phenomenon, that culture is essentially private and only a secondary determinant to negotiation behavior, and that negotiation is a rational strategy. Alternatively, some take the view that culture is relevant to the process of negotiation; that there are cultural differences identifiable as key characteristics, and that intercultural negotiation can be perceived as requiring a range of strategies. Others argue more strongly that culture is central to the shaping of perceptions of conflict and participation in the process and that the strategies offered in books on intercultural negotiation are superficial representations of the “other” culture,

representing little more than etiquette or recognition. Finally, there are those who would argue that cultural differences convey radically different and incommunicable views of the world and that such differences outweigh the possibility of reaching a common ground. Whereas the first view represents the assumption that communication is always possible and rarely impeded by cultural or identity factors, the fourth represents the argument that differences are incommensurable and that negotiation is always likely to be both affected and inhibited by difference. If the first view minimizes the impact of culture, the fourth maximizes it to the point where communication is impossible (Avruch 2003).

Time and Negotiation

Time as an aspect of cultural life is of interest both because of the observed variations in the meanings attributed to time across cultures — its speed, passage, and meaning; and our location in the past, present, or future — and because of the relationship between increasingly global time regimes and the persistence of local perceptions of time. The things we have in common, such as the passage of time, aging, seasons, and diurnal rhythms, also separate us by virtue of the ways in which we live as much in the perception of time as in the reality.¹¹ Thus, it seems inevitable that the social practices of bargaining, dialogue, and negotiation are shaped by the actors' experiences of time.

Just as isolating culture as a key variable in shaping negotiations can be risky, seeking to isolate and define the impact of cultural perceptions of time on negotiation poses its own challenges. Although time is just one thread in the web of culture, perceptions of time have been regularly identified in studies of the dimensions of cultural difference; and topics examined have included aspects of time likely to be relevant to Western negotiators, such as punctuality. As Guy Olivier Faure and Jeffrey Rubin wrote,

Cross-cultural differences in the understanding of time also may disturb the process of negotiation. In the West time is conceived of as something akin to a commodity in limited supply; just like a good, it can be saved, wasted, controlled, or organized. In contrast, in the Near East time is not a phenomenon characterized by scarcity. As a result, disparate conceptions of time may complicate the important task of respecting the general time frame of the deadlines established for a particular negotiation (Faure and Rubin 1993: 11).

Similarly, Richard Brislin and Tomoko Yoshida (1994) also noted differences between cultures in perceptions of punctuality.

How time is perceived across cultures is given more substance in the analysis of Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (1997), who approached the question from the point of view of business management

and negotiation. The idea of clock time, which was introduced to the working masses in the industrialized West during the Industrial Revolution, enshrined punctuality as a social value and made the uniform standardization of the length of the paid working day possible. Globalization now seems to be extending that “work day” — technology makes it possible to be “plugged-in” twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; one is often expected to be available to clients and customers at work in another time zone, even if one is “off the clock” (Goudsblom 2001). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) argue, however, that these developments have not completely eliminated nonindustrial perceptions of time and the distinctions we may draw between formal and informal time and between work and leisure time (see also Goudsblom 2001). Time retains certain symbolic and cultural values that still challenge and occasionally subvert the imperatives of globalization. Indeed, the Slow Food Movement may be an indicator of growing resistance to the imperious clock time of the “24/7” and “always-on” world.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner further distinguish cultural perceptions of time as either sequential or synchronic. In synchronic cultures, time involves the management of multiple activities and interchangeable sequences, and punctuality competes with other cultural values, such as relationships, obligations, and hierarchy. Such cultures tend to be simultaneously more communitarian and particularist. Status tends to be based more on ascription or on collectively conferred or inherited status and “durable characteristics” (1997: 132) such as gender or age rather than of “achieved” or more individually attained status. In sequential cultures, on the other hand, time is metaphorically perceived as a line, the ordering of time is “efficient,” punctuality is given prime value, and time is a limited commodity. Sequential cultures tend to be more instrumental in their attitudes toward relationships; the present activity is viewed as a means of achieving future goals, status is more fragile and performance-based, and connections can be discarded for personal gain.

Several points may be taken from this analysis. Bearing in mind the risks of generalizations about national types, influential, (if unconscious) time-related values seem to shape intercultural communications. And these perceptions can be expected to affect relationships. Finally, differences in behaviors related to timekeeping, prioritizing, task completion, and punctuality that can cause actors in negotiation to judge each other negatively may arise from differences in their underlying cultural perceptions of time.

Scholars have also drawn a distinction between cultures in terms of the weight given to the past, present, and future — that is, the orientation toward a “time horizon.” One of the difficulties that has arisen, for example, in the ongoing negotiations in New Zealand between the indigenous Maori and the Crown concerning compensation for historical land confiscations is that, according to Maori perceptions, “history” and its obligations are

not wholly in the past but also in the future. To put it at its simplest, Maori negotiators bring with them the weight of their perceived obligations not only to future generations (to secure financial redress, for example) but also to their ancestors, to honor tribal and ancestral memory. Time, in this sense, carries the weight of the “presence” of the past and the obligations of that past to the future, with different meanings for the negotiation parties and for their constituencies.¹²

Time, of course, is often itself an issue to be negotiated or a source of conflict to be resolved, affecting perceptions of what good outcomes might be and of how long the negotiation process should take. This is true not only when the substance of the negotiations concerns matters of history but also when issues of time have a commercial impact (for capitalists, for example, “time is money”). At the very least, the recognition that there may be competing perceptions of the meaning of time and history should alert negotiators to the potentially disruptive impact of these perceptions and to the opportunity to develop common bases for goal setting and task-orientation.

Richard Brislin and Eugene Kim (2003) provided an analysis of ten aspects of time in which they distinguished between the perceived *flexibility* of time and the *pace* of time. Flexibility encompasses punctuality, clock time versus event time, the overlaps between work and social time, and polychronic/synchronic distinction. These distinctions are typically unarticulated and unconscious: most of us, if asked, would not consciously consider that in making arrangements to meet, for example, there may be a difference between a literal time (“8:30 P.M.”) and a broadly defined event (“dinner”).

Under the category of pace, Brislin and Kim (2003) placed attitudes toward waiting and queues; patience or impatience about (perceived) delays; orientations to the past, present, and future; the symbolic or metaphoric value of time; and perceptions about the “efficient” use of time. Interestingly, they also suggested that this category includes an aspect of behavior directly related to the mechanics of negotiation: one’s degree of comfort with long silences. A negotiator’s discomfort with such silences can reveal his or her preference to “use” time efficiently and move the negotiation along in a timely manner rather than accepting that the pace of events is other than — and probably slower than — she or he might prefer. In the Pacific Islands, for example, respect is accorded to a negotiation counterpart if an intervention or suggestion is followed by silence, which indicates that the suggestion is being considered. A negotiator unfamiliar with this convention risks filling the apparent gaps with further explanations or unnecessary verbiage.

In a negotiation, implicit attitudes about time can affect the pace of the conversation, the degree to which the apparently available (i.e., “scheduled”) time is filled with activities that are perceived as extraneous or

irrelevant (social conversation, meals), and the setting of priorities. Parties with different cultural attitudes toward time will accord different priorities to the kinds of activities and small talk that may be necessary for building a negotiation relationship.

Becoming More “Time Sensitive” in Negotiations

What, then, can we make of the impact of, and our response to, these differences in the perception of time? Time’s effect on negotiations — cross-cultural or otherwise — can, I believe, be broken down into three categories; the first two relate to the *process* of negotiations; the third one involves *substance*:

- *Punctuality and timeliness* — the importance or lack of importance placed on being “on time” and getting the negotiations under way.
- *The use of time* — the overall length of the negotiation and how such activities as relationship building, story telling, etc., are prioritized in terms of how much time is allotted for them.
- *Time as an issue within the negotiation* — How far back in history does the discussion of relevant events, conflicts, grievances, etc., go?¹³ How far into the future do possible remedies extend?

How can negotiators better manage conflicts created by actors’ differing perceptions of time? Let’s take punctuality as an example. First, we must acknowledge that perceptions and behaviors related to punctuality are not completely innate, nor are they fixed. If they were, there would be little scope for negotiation about such behavior. Rather, such behavior is more accurately seen as both culturally nuanced *and* open to choice. Thus, punctuality — or lack of it — is likely to be a shared trait not because it is innate or hard-wired in particular groups but because it is a matter of common practice. It is not immutable, but rather an individual and shared adaptation. Further, at least at an individual level, to be punctual (or not) might also be seen as a choice: whatever the conventions with which someone has lived, there is a degree of autonomy in specific instances.¹⁴

But perhaps most importantly, behaviors such as punctuality, like other important elements of a negotiation, can be seen as open to the creation of an equilibrium between the parties (Basu and Weibull 2002). There are at least two aspects to this: one is that time and timing are matters that can be expressly on the table for agreement; the other is that they can be more implicit elements of either party’s leverage, especially if time is, in contractual matters, for example, of the essence to the negotiation.

Several options are open to negotiators in situations where punctuality is an issue. First, there is simply value in knowing that time *can* make a difference, not only in terms of the familiar features of “timekeeping” but also more subliminally in terms of the construction of relationships and

self-image. This kind of information, particularly the more subtle analyses such as Brislin and Kim's (2003), provides the first steps toward developing what Michelle LeBaron (2003: *passim*) refers to as "cultural fluency," which can be an important negotiation skill in itself.

Having that information allows for a greater degree of conscious analysis of the possibility that time shapes a negotiation. A more fully developed understanding of time may both permit negotiators to recognize the extent to which such behaviors as punctuality are culturally predisposed and discourage them from judging the other party inappropriately when the other party's behaviors do not fulfill the negotiators' expectations.

Once both parties understand that they perceive punctuality differently and accord it different priorities, they can make this understanding explicit, removing it as a subterranean and unpredictable obstacle or source of tension. In naming and acknowledging the differences we may have in the use and perception of time, we diminish the opportunities for misunderstanding.

Having made differing perceptions about time more explicit, negotiators may choose to create specific norms for their own conduct. If, as the preceding analysis suggests, time is a social construct, then it is not unrealistic to imagine that negotiators can agree on the norms and expectations that might be time-related. Time, in this respect, becomes a part of the process-oriented aspect of a negotiation. In the first instance, the "visiting" negotiator needs to be familiar with what are likely to be the conventions on the use of time — in social events, scenic visits, and the like — and build this into the allocated time for the negotiation. Second, having become aware of that likely use of time, the negotiator may well need to adjust his or her own expectations as to the "normal" duration of negotiations. Third, the negotiator will need to elicit agreements on procedural issues such as the starting time of meetings — bearing in mind the probable delicacy of such interventions if they are likely to be seen as prescriptions rather than as efforts to coordinate expectations.

It may also be advisable to get some help. In the same way that we might need to rely on translators for language purposes, we may also need to rely on "cultural" translators or mediators. This tactic could be risky: the other party might suspect that the cultural mediator or translator is in some way also an agent; and this third party could effectively, if by default, become a party to the negotiation. There are also risks in the "translation" being partial, to the extent that the insider is so embedded in his or her own culture that they cannot fully explain or stand aside from the nuances of what is going on. That said, the assistance of third parties may often be the only practical route to understanding and convergence in intercultural negotiations. Increasingly, for example, it is possible to identify professionals whose work involves the facilitation of communication across cultures.¹⁵

Finally, consciously incorporating time-related elements into a negotiation permits participants to engage deliberately in the kind of intercultural adaptation that Stephen Weiss (1994) suggests serves as a constructive alternative to denying or avoiding differences, or to expecting that the *other* parties can and ought to make the necessary adjustments.

Time turns out to be, on closer examination, a more significant if less tangible element of many negotiations than it has been given credit for, especially to the extent that time is wrapped up not only in overt conduct but also in the typically unconscious construction of identity, status, and relationships. By discussing time and our differing perceptions about it more explicitly, we are more likely to avoid the pitfalls, frustrations, and judgments that frequently arise and to create more creative options for satisfying both parties' interests.

Discussions of cultural differences in negotiation frequently focus on the challenges that these differences create and on the *strategic* tools negotiators can employ to cope with the other parties' views of the world. Taking the themes identified in the exploration of culture and time, I see two threads to the significance of time in negotiation: one is the *experiential* dimension, the recognition that time does mean different things not only across cultures but across most aspects of human communication (in the negotiations context this can be heard in the different ways that negotiators refer to the pace of events and the "presence" of the past). The other is the *management* dimension: the complex of understandings, narratives, and behaviors we share or construct to synchronize our perceptions and activities. Consequently, cross-cultural negotiators must pay attention to two elements of time. First, they must consider that time is not merely or obviously a matter of chronology, it is also a matter of assumptions, interpretations, and expectations shared by others and not always articulated or explicit. Second, they should be aware of the ways in which time is perceived and used in other cultures — the negotiator must literally *devote time* to gaining agreements and achieving commitments *about time*. Just as negotiation theory and practice have drawn our attention in recent years to the importance of process in negotiations, so too does the work on time suggest that this may require our specific attention.

Left unacknowledged, perceptions of time are susceptible either to becoming inadvertent obstacles or deliberate sources of manipulation — the latter especially if one negotiation party knows that time matters in important ways to the other, not least in knowing that the visiting negotiator has already made a reservation for the flight home and needs to complete the deal within a limited timeframe. Whether we are talking of couples or of cultures who differ in their views of time and timeliness, knowing that time does matter in negotiations, we need to do two things. First, we must understand and acknowledge our and the other's probable perceptions of time, the weight we give to punctuality, the likely scope of

time as an agenda issue in the negotiation, the (dis)comfort we have with things “taking as long as they take.” Second, we must address these aspects of the negotiation, at the outset and throughout, as we would make explicit and address other elements of the negotiation process. In the same way that emotions unacknowledged can sabotage a negotiation but recognized ones can provide the core of the process of settlement, so time deliberately addressed is at least brought to the surface and not left as a significant yet subterranean component and potential source of frustration. If we return to the first part of the title of this paper, the time it takes to negotiate will be either “yours” or “mine” if left unstated; or it could be “ours” — and part of the negotiators’ equilibrium — if acknowledged as a component of the negotiation.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Walther and Tidwell (1995).
2. See, for example, Ornstein (1969).
3. For example, Rao (n.d).
4. For example, Bohm (1980).
5. See Riskin (2004). See also the Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative, available from http://www.pon.harvard.edu/research/projects/b_drp.php3 and Fox (2004).
6. Immediately we risk getting into difficulty here, recognizing the span of nations, cultures, ethnicities, and negotiation styles that are encompassed in that one term “Asian.” I use the term simply to avoid identifying the specific students or their national origins at this stage: the specifics of their cultural identity are less important to this story.
7. The risk and the temptation in generic guides to negotiating with other cultures is just this, that we know “Americans” or “Germans” or “the Chinese” have certain cultural characteristics and, as a result, negotiate in particular ways. While we satisfy our cultural stereotypes, we fail to capture the richness of and reasons for behavior as subtly nuanced as the perception of and metaphoric value of time.
8. Chronemics, as a discipline or field of study is not readily dated. It draws, together with studies of cultural differences in spatial relationships and language use, from general studies of cultural patterns in communication. See, for example:
<http://www.saintmarys.edu/~berdayes/vincehome/courses/comm200/notes/chronemicsf02.html>;
http://www.nicholaspackwood.com/nonverbal_9.html;
<http://www.saintmarys.edu/~berdayes/vincehome/courses/comm200/notes/chronemicsf02.html> (time and temporal communication);
<http://www1.chapman.edu/comm/comm/faculty/thobbs/com401/gass/gass9.10/sld009.htm>;
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/class/languages/teib/unit5b.htm>
9. See the work of Clifford Geertz on the perils of “being there and writing here” or of occupying two cognitive and experiential worlds with different degrees of familiarity and fluency.
10. Belbutowski (1996) provides an example of this in commenting on the perception of time in Arab culture: “Time, then, in the Arab culture carries the vacuousness of the Indian yuga.” Whether this was an intentionally well-chosen word or not, the implication is that the other’s perception of time is in some way inferior, especially to the extent that “vacuous” carries the connotation of “unintelligent” or “irrational.”
11. As a brief diversion, pause to think of what you might understand by expressions such as “recently,” “soon,” “in a moment,” or even “tomorrow,” “immediately,” and “a couple of minutes.” Do you also, if asked if you would like a coffee, look at your watch to determine whether it’s “time” for that coffee? On a more serious note, recall also that recent commentators on conflicts such as those in the Balkans and Sri Lanka note that those immersed in the conflicts regard as “recent” those affronts to their people and identity that occurred centuries earlier.

12. A colleague in the Crown Law Office, the body responsible for representing the Crown in the negotiations between the state and Maori, comments that time is one of the major sources of tension in the settlement negotiations, where an agency working within proscribed time and fiscal limits meets a tradition that values the opportunity for its people to speak and to be heard without regard for the time it takes. Compare also with Lederach's comment on "renegotiating history and identity": "The world view of indigenous peoples suggests that story, place, and identity are linked. They understand that collective narrative and survival are connected. In other words, 'time' is not a commodity found in a linear sequence where the remote past and remote future are separated at the extreme ends. Time is best understood, as was written by the physicist Mbiti, as spacetime" (Lederach 2005: 146).

13. Particularly in approaching the resolution of enduring and violent conflicts, it is common that the parties will present narratives of grievance going well beyond immediate and recent events: disputants who are conflict-saturated will also saturate time with the conflict. See, for example, Barkan (2000) and Minow (2002). Counselors and mediators will also be well aware of cases in which disputants are tempted to invoke the whole litany and history of grievances.

14. This may be especially the case where "cultural" norms are used strategically: many negotiators will have found themselves in situations where behaviors presented as cultural imperatives are in fact either personal preferences or more flexible than indicated.

15. Consider, for example, the members of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR: <http://www.sietar.org/>).

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