

Cross Cultural Skills in International Negotiations: Technology as a Catalyst and Barrier in the Internet Age

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Introduction

In 1803, James Monroe and Robert Livingston began negotiations with the government of France on a deal that would literally change the face of the United States: The Louisiana Purchase. Assuming they were going to Paris to negotiate for the “Isle of Orleans” (now New Orleans) and West Florida, the U. S. negotiators were sent with instructions to expend as much as two million dollars to make the purchase. As is common in negotiations, they were presented with several surprises.

The first surprise was that West Florida was off the table. The second surprise was that Napoleon I’s chief negotiator, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, offered an “all or nothing” deal for the Louisiana Territory. In what must be one of the all time great exhibitions of negotiator *chutzpah*, Monroe and Livingston negotiated a deal that settled the purchase price (\$15 million), payment terms, interest rate, and transfer of liability for outstanding claims, all in the space of less than a month. For good measure, they also negotiated a twelve-year tariff agreement. Then they got on a sailing ship and headed back to tell “the home office” what they had done.¹

Although this example of international/intercultural negotiation is more than 200 years old, there are a number of elements faced by Monroe and Livingston that have remained constant over the centuries, and which are affected by the development and application of technology:

- There were developments at the table unanticipated by the negotiators or the parties giving instructions to the negotiators.
- There were opportunities presented at the table that were not consistent with the limits set for the negotiators.
- There were multiple languages used in the negotiations and in drawing up the final agreement.
- There was a communication lag between the negotiators and their clients back in Washington.

¹ There are many good histories of the Louisiana Purchase, including Thomas Fleming’s [The Louisiana Purchase](#) (John Wiley and Sons, 2003), and The History Channel’s 2005 publication, [The Louisiana Purchase](#). For quick reference see Francis Coughlin’s article in the Negotiator Magazine <<http://www.negotiatormagazine.com/outstanding.shtml>>, or the Questia entry at <http://www.questia.com/library/encyclopedia/louisiana_purchase.jsp>.

- There were multiple influences and interested parties away from the table, spread across a wide geographical area, all of whom had to be taken into consideration and brought in to agree on the final deal.

It goes without saying that Monroe and Livingston would face a much different negotiating environment if they were working today. Information and communication technology (ICT) has changed the way people around the world communicate generally, and it has radically changed the environment in which international/intercultural negotiations take place.²

In the early 1960's, J. C. R. Licklider, an MIT professor and the first director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO), conceived of what he called the "Galactic Network."³ Today, Licklider's name for his idea is a bit reminiscent of Star Trek, but a series of articles by Licklider and work by scientists across the United States eventually led to the creation of the Internet. Today the idea of "the Internet in space" is being pursued by a number of researchers, so we may soon have Licklider's Galactic Network, after all.⁴

What matters to negotiators, however, are the concrete changes that ICT has wrought here on this planet. Negotiations are ultimately exercises in communication, and, generally speaking, ICT has changed the way we communicate (including the way we communicate across cultural boundaries) in some significant ways.

As a rule, it is fair to say that all of the intercultural barriers and problems associated with international/intercultural negotiations remain when technology becomes part of the negotiation environment. There are some direct intercultural

² Throughout this chapter I will use ICT to refer to a wide range of communication technologies including telephonic and mobile telephonic communication, as well as e-mail, text messaging, and other Internet based communication platforms.

³ David Clark and Vinton Cerf, et al., "A Brief History of the Internet," Reston, VA: The Internet Society, August 4th, 2000. (Available from <<http://www.isoc.org>>); Also, "MIT and the Galactic Network," Retrieved 7 July 2008 <<http://ecommerce.hostip.info/pages/741/Mit-Galactic-Network.html>>.

⁴ Glasner, Joanna, "Pushing the Internet Into Space," WIRED Magazine, 14 March 2006. Retrieved 7 July 2008 <www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2006/03/70377>; Also, "Net Reaches Out to Final Frontier," BBC News Online, 13 April, 2007. Retrieved 7 July 2008 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6551807.stm>>.

