

News Release

James Hathaway, 480-965-6375

Hathaway@asu.edu

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Source: Robert Cialdini, 480-965-4971, atrbc@mainex1.asu.edu

Study Finds Persuasiveness Is Attuned to Cultural Differences

Suppose your company has been successfully doing business with a firm in Central Europe for two years. During that time, you have frequently had to ask your European partners for the favor of providing updated marketing information. Your main contact, Andrzej, or his coworkers have usually gone out of their way to help you. Suppose further that you need updated information once more and that in a phone conversation you make your request as follows, "Andrzej, you have been so helpful in the past that I'm hoping you can provide us with updated information again."

In so doing, you will have made a mistake. According to a recently published study in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, you would have better success if you had said, "Andrzej, your coworkers have been so helpful in the past that I'm hoping that you can provide us with updated information again." It is an easy mistake for an American to make. Why? Because Americans assume that everyone prefers to operate according to the principle of personal consistency—the tendency to decide what's right to do in a situation based on what one has previously done there. But, in many countries, personal consistency is outweighed by the principle of social proof—the tendency to decide what's right to do in a situation based on what one's group has previously done.

The study, conducted simultaneously in the U.S. and in Poland, was authored by Robert Cialdini, Wilhelmina Wosinska, Daniel Barrett, and Jonathan Butner at Arizona State University and by Malgorzata Gornik-Durose at the University of Silesia, Poland. The researchers found that when American students were asked to participate without pay in a marketing survey, they were more influenced by their own history of agreement to such requests than by their peers' history of agreement. But, in Poland, the opposite occurred. There, what a student's peer group had previously done was more important than what the student him- or herself had previously done.

The researchers explained their findings in terms of a cultural difference between Americans and citizens of most other countries of the world. The U.S. is dominated by individualism, which is an orientation that assigns highest priority to the preferences and rights of the person. However, many more nations are dominated by a collectivistic orientation, which assigns highest priority to the preferences and rights of the group. Thus, when asking an American for a favor, you will be more successful by pointing out that it fits with what that individual has done before. But when asking a favor of most nonAmericans, you will be more successful by pointing out that it fits with what that person's peer group has done before.

One of the researchers, Dr. Robert Cialdini, stated, "I think our results offer a specific example of a general rule that is becoming increasingly important in our globalized environment: To be effective in international communication, we must not presume that our values and approaches are shared by



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members of other societies."

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