

## CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION-MEANS AND WAYS TO MAKE IT EFFECTIVE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Cross-cultural communication is a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures. Cross-cultural communication is imperative for companies that have a diverse workforce and participate in the global economy. It is also important for employees to understand the factors that are part of an effective, diverse workforce.*



*This cultural way of communication endeavours to bring together unrelated areas such as cultural anthropology and establishes area of communication. Its core idea is to establish and understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other. It also aims at producing some guidelines with which people from different cultures can better communicate with each other. The following article describes the effective means of cross cultural communication, problems faced in intercultural communication and the methodology of solving the issues raised in cross cultural communication.*

*Language socialization can be broadly defined as*

***“An Investigation Of How Language Both Presupposes And Creates A New, Social Relations In Cultural Context”.***

### **1. CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Cross-cultural communication has become strategically important to companies due to the growth of global business, technology, and the Internet. Understanding cross-cultural communication is important for any company that has a diverse workforce or plans on conducting global business. This type of communication involves an understanding of how people from different cultures speak, communicate, and perceive the world around them. Cross-cultural communication in an

organization deals with understanding different business customs, beliefs and communication strategies.

Language differences, high-context vs. low-context cultures, nonverbal differences, and power distance are major factors that can affect cross-cultural communication. Let's take a look at how cross-cultural differences can cause potential issues within an organization. Jack is a manager at a New Mexico-based retail conglomerate. He has flown to Japan to discuss a potential partnership with a local Japanese company. His business contact, Yamato, is his counterpart within the Japanese company. Jack has never been to Japan before, and he's not familiar with their cultural norms. Let's look at some of the ways that a lack of cultural understanding can create a barrier for business success by examining how Jack handles his meeting with Yamato.

## **2. ORIGINS AND CULTURE**

During the Cold War, the economy of the United States was largely self-contained because the world was polarized into two separate and competing powers: the East and the West. However, changes and advancements in economic relationships, political systems, and technological options began to break down old cultural barriers. Business transformed from individual-country capitalism to global capitalism.

Thus, the study of cross-cultural communication was originally found within businesses and government, both seeking to expand globally. Businesses began to offer language training to their employees and programs were developed to train employees to understand how to act when abroad.

## **3. HIGH VS LOW CONTEXT CULTURE**

The concept of high- and low-context culture relates to how an employee's thoughts, opinions, feelings, and upbringing affect how they act within a given culture. North America and Western Europe are generally considered to have low-context cultures. This means that businesses in these places have direct, individualistic employees who tend to base decisions on facts. This type of businessperson wants specifics noted in contracts and may have issues with trust.

High-context cultures are the opposite in that trust is the most important part of business dealings. There are areas in the Middle East, Asia and Africa that can be considered high context. Organizations that have high-context cultures are collectivist and focus on interpersonal relationships. Individuals from high-context cultures might be interested in getting to know the person they are conducting business with in order to get a gut feeling on decision making. They may also be more concerned about business teams and group success rather than individual achievement.

## **4. NONVERBAL DIFFERENCES**

Gestures and eye contact are two areas of nonverbal communication that are utilized differently across cultures. Companies must train employees in the correct way to handle nonverbal communication as to not offend other cultures. For example, American workers tend to wave their hand and use a finger to point when giving nonverbal direction. Extreme gesturing is considered rude in some cultures.



While pointing may be considered appropriate in some contexts in the United States, using a finger to point towards another person is wrong because that gesture is considered rude in Japan. Instead, he might gesture with an open hand, with his palm facing up, toward the person. Nonverbal communication lies in our gestures, and can be broken down into five subcategories:

### **1.1 EMBLEMS**

Emblems refer to sign language (such as, thumbs up, one of the most recognized symbols in the world)

### **1.2 ILLUSTRATORS**

Illustrators mimic what is spoken (such as gesturing how much time is left by holding up a certain number of fingers).

### **1.3 REGULATORS**

Regulators act as a way of conveying meaning through gestures (raising up a hand for instance indicates that one has a certain question about what was just said)

### **1.4 AFFECT DISPLAYS**

Affect displays reveal emotions such as happiness (through a smile) or sadness (mouth trembling, tears).

## **5. LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES**

The biggest issue dealing with cross-cultural communication is the difficulty created by language barriers. For example, a person does not speak Japanese, so he is concerned with his ability to communicate effectively with another. There are some strategies that he can use to help establish a rapport with another person. He can explain himself without words by using emotions, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues. He can also use drawings and ask for an interpreter.

### **Good Skills For Cross Cultural Diversity**

- Slow down when you speak. Allow those who don't have the same native language as you the time to interpret what you are saying.

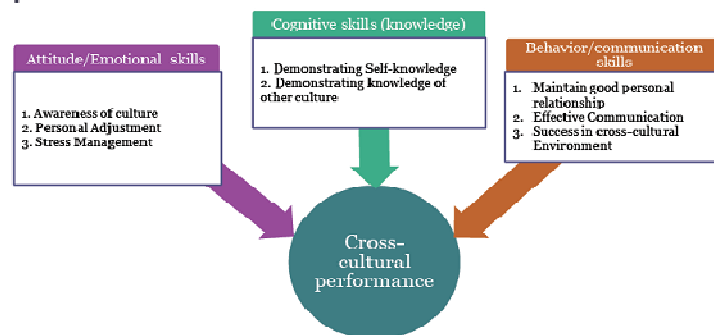
- Speak clearly and concisely. Make eye contact and enunciate plainly. Avoid using ambiguous or dual-meaning words. One of the problems non-native-English-speaking cultures have with the English language is misunderstanding the many meanings one word can have.
- Keep it simple. Think in terms of your audience, and speak to their understanding. Don't make long speeches that lose your group. Allow listeners the time to soak in what you have said. Pay attention to your audience and be an active speaker and listener. You can ascertain a group's grasp of your communication by their response to your words.
- Maintain respect and courtesy for people who come from different cultures. When you respect the people you communicate with, this helps reduce the stress they feel when trying to understand what you are saying. Doing basic research on specific ways to interact with the cultures you will be coming into contact with is a great way to show your multi-cultural group that you respect them.
- Smile and be open. Your body language communicates your acceptance -- or non-acceptance -- and respect, as it helps put listeners at ease. Your body language conveys unspoken communication. Avoid large gestures with your hands, as this can be intimidating to people who might misunderstand your meaning. Keeping your arms crossed often makes people think you are not open to what they have to say.
- Avoid slang. Slang words are unique to individual cultures and not always interpreted correctly. To ensure effective cross-cultural communication, don't use slang words others might not know.
- Shun humor. What is funny in one culture might not be in another. Humor might be misunderstood and interpreted in a bad light. While humor is a good icebreaker, it can backfire when the cross-cultural group misses humor's meaning. When in doubt, avoid using humor when communicating with people from many cultures.
- Adopt a formal communication approach until you develop a rapport with your group. A casual, informal approach can be upsetting to people from different cultures, especially when you have just met them. Use a respectful and formal mode of speech until you have developed a relationship with your cross-cultural group.
- Stay away from using negative questions or answers. Double negatives are confusing enough to those with English as their native language. In a cross-cultural situation, double negatives are easily misunderstood. Keep questions and answers simple so everyone understands.
- Ask for feedback. Request members of the cross-cultural group to speak up and provide interaction or ask questions. When you permit two-way communication, this helps prevent misunderstandings and clears up questions people might have.
- Summarize what you have said. Don't assume that just because you said it everyone understands. Repeat what you have said in a different way, summarize it and allow people the time to grasp what you have said. By summarizing what you have said, you can verify that everyone is on the same page.

## 6. TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

**Know yourself:** knowledge of self and behaviour patterns are critical to effective cross-cultural communication. Each of us has a personal culture. Often in North America, a person's identity is centered around "I". The culture of "me" is the biggest cause of rifts between relationships. When two cultural entities meet the natural reaction is defensive. Recognizing your personal triggers

improves your cross-cultural communication. If you can recognize emotions, you can manage them. If not, you may try to push your values system on someone else.

## How to improve cross-cultural performance?



**Be Aware of Differences in Personal Space:** Personal space is an important issue in communication. When someone enters your personal space you get a brain freeze and tune out – this is where miscommunication can occur. In Canada, our personal “bubble” is about one arm length (elbow to finger). However, in many other countries, personal space is much closer. When speaking with someone from another culture and they enter your bubble, acknowledge your emotions so you can deal with it and move on. Recognize that the “affront” to your personal space was not intentional, but simply what the other person is used to.

**Don't Be Afraid of ... Pauses in Conversation** Every language has a cadence. This is one of the most difficult things to learn about a language and usually takes about a generation to master. Using large pauses is not typical in Canadian cadence, but in many cultures this is standard. In fact, if you don't pause and reflect before answering it's seen as rude and disrespectful. This point is especially important when interviewing candidates from another culture. Keep in mind that when the person pauses it's not because they don't know the answer, but that they are used to reflecting before responding.

**Stay focused on your goals:** Working with people from all over the world and having customers from over 18 countries makes building intercultural relationships a way to get your work done better.

**Understand the culture within yourself:** Keep aware of the fact that you see the world in a completely biased way because of your own background, personal history, culture, etc.

**Manage your attitudes towards the culture:** You don't always have to love the culture. But you do have to keep check on your reactions to values and customs that are different from your own. The first two principles can also help you manage your attitudes.

**Direct your learning of the culture:** Books and training courses can help but the best way to understand a culture is through personal experience. Use the information you have and actively try to learn more about the cultures you have to deal with on your day to day work.

**Learn about the new culture efficiently:** You can't learn everything about the culture before your trip, call or meeting. It's unrealistic. Focus on learning a few things that fit your interests, and use those to make connections and learn more while you are abroad, in a meeting or doing a call..

**Cope with cultural surprises:** No matter how much you prepare in advance, you will find yourself faced with people acting in ways that you find puzzling. When you do, try to find out why. Doing so will often lead to new insights. Avoid reactionary behaviour at all costs.

**Take a cultural perspective:** Try to see things from the point of view of the people from the other culture. By taking a cultural perspective, you may create a whole new understanding of what's going on around you. A way to empathize with cultures I have not mingled with is watching documentaries about the culture in the country and trying hard to place myself in their position.

**Plan cross-cultural communication:** Think ahead of time about what you have to say and how you want the other person to perceive you. Use what you know about the culture to figure out the best way to get that across.

**Control how you present yourself:** Be deliberate about how you present and express yourself. Sometimes you'll be most effective if you're just yourself. Other times you have to adapt how you present yourself to the culture you are in to be most effective.

**Reflect and seek feedback:** Continue to reflect on and learn from your interactions and experiences after they occur. After an interaction you can think about whether you got the messages across you intended. You can even ask a local how they think you did.

## 7. SMALL BUSINESS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

As business has turned more and more to an integrated world market to meet its needs, the difficulties of communicating at a global level have become increasingly widespread. Lack of understanding deriving from ethnocentrism or ignorance of culturally based assumptions erroneously believed to be universal can readily escalate to unproductive conflict among people of differing cultural orientation. This may occur on the domestic front as well. With the increasing numbers of immigrants to the U.S. our "melting pot" society leads to cultural diversity in the workplace. In combination with a growing emphasis on global markets and an interdependent and internationalized economy, the need for dealing with intercultural differences and cross-cultural communication barriers has grown.



Small business owners and representatives face a sometimes dizzying array of communication considerations when they decide to move into the international arena, but most issues can be satisfactorily addressed by

- Respectfulness toward all people you meet
- Thinking before speaking
- Research on current business etiquette, cultural and customer sensitivities, current events, and relevant history.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The Internet and modern technology have opened up new marketplaces that allow us to promote our businesses to new geographic locations and cultures. And given that it can now be as easy to work with people remotely as it is to work face-to-face, cross-cultural communication is increasingly the new norm. After all, if communication is electronic, it's as easy to work with someone in another country as it is to work with someone in the next town. And why limit yourself to working with people within convenient driving distance when, just as conveniently, you can work with the most knowledgeable people in the entire world?

For those of us who are native English-speakers, it is fortunate that English seems to be the language that people use if they want to reach the widest possible audience. However, even for native English speakers, cross-cultural communication can be an issue: Just witness the mutual incomprehension that can sometimes arise between people from different English-speaking countries. In this new world, good cross-cultural communication is a must.

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