

INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Culture is commonly defined as the ocean of values, attitudes, behaviors and transactions which govern the human life and civilization. Culture is the root of all policies, programmes, products, services and other activities which take place across the globe. In the world, there is no common culture, language, values and aspirations. There is ever growing need for constant communication across cultures. The cultural exchange programmes are becoming imminent in the age of globalization since businesses are becoming increasingly global in their operations. The multi-national corporations have understood the need for communication across cultures in view of their ever increasing business operations. Inter-cultural communication also enables the business organizations to understand the diversified needs of the customers across the globe and fulfill their demands. The cultural interaction has become an important means of facilitating inter-cultural relations which benefits the people regardless of profession. The cultural mis-understandings bring about conflict of interest and hamper the cultural exchange. Cultural understanding facilitates better business transactions. It is necessary to know the cultural background of individuals and institutions in order to understand each other and respond correctly in intercultural situations. Scholars have identified strong linkage between culture and communication. The world is a mixture of races, ethnicities and cultures which has resulted in rich diversity. In the age of globalization, modern organizations are required to achieve the goal of unity in diversity in order to promote peace, tranquility and progress. Intercultural communication has become a prominent instrument of global unity and integration.

The modern business organizations are required to develop meaningful intercultural communication in order to do business on the basis of good human relationships. Modern business organizations accept both parties to come to the table with their best offer. The business executives and communicators need to be aware of cultural differences and adapt their style of communication when meeting people from different cultural backgrounds which vary in their concern for space and business relationships within it.

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Intercultural communication basically deals with people from other cultures in a way that minimizes conflict of interest and maximizes rewarding business relationships.

PREAMBLE

Culture is commonly defined as the ocean of values, attitudes, behaviors and transactions which govern the human life and civilization. Culture is the root of all policies, programmes, products, services and other activities which take place across the globe. In the world, there is no common culture, language, values and aspirations. The whole world is known for 'pluralism' which represents cultural, social, economic and political differences and backgrounds. In the age of globalization, geographical boundaries are shrinking on account of commendable information and communication technologies and applications. The process of globalization has also paved the way for inter-cultural communication and transactions in all spheres of human life. The concept of inter-cultural communication, nature and significance of inter-cultural communication, globalization and intercultural communication, need for developing cultural intelligence, guidelines for effective intercultural communication, media of intercultural communication in business organizations and recent trends and developments in intercultural communication for business promotion are presented in this paper which is based on review of literature.

CONCEPT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The subject of culture is highly complex and no country has a common culture in the present times. There are cultural differences that are found in every state or country. Within a culture, differences between the urban people and rural people, rich people and poor people, educated people and illiterate people and tribal

people and non tribal people could be seen due to several differences and orders.

Culture has been discussed across the globe and defined in many ways by the anthropologists. According to Lull (2000:25) "Culture is a way of life of a group of people. The stereotyped patterns of learning behavior are handed down from one generation to the next through means of language and imitation". Appadurai (1997:01) has defined culture as the "shared ways in which groups of people understand and interpret the world". The people living in different countries have developed not only different ways to interpret events; they have different habits, values and ways of relating to one another. The people have cultivated the habit of perceiving their own culture as normal culture and other cultures as bad, wrong, peculiar or such. This is viewed as *ethnocentrism* by the anthropologists under it impedes cultural integration across cultures. The inter-cultural communication is defined as the cultural interaction between two or more cultures which brings about mutual understanding, respect, cooperation and harmony across the cultures. In the age of globalization, an inter-cultural relation has been promoted in order to cement the communication gaps and facilitate integrated learning and progress.

Culture has been defined as the received and accepted set of rules guiding human behavior. These rules are absorbed and eventually become engrained in each individual's mind to the point where they are second nature. The persons with similar sets of social rules tend to behave in the same manner, which then becomes the normal behavior expected in

different cultural situations. The behavior of an individual is noticed only when it deviates from the norm and becomes a noticeable behavior in a particular culture.

The cultural ethos enables the people to interpret different values and behaviors in that culture. Differences in cultures are seen in the way people from different cultures behave during different occasions. Cultural differences are also noticeable in the way people in groups act when they meet other groups during different occasions. Different cultures have different ways in which people address each other during different occasions. Absence of cultural awareness may result in serious misunderstandings between individuals, groups and nations.

Cultural diversity in the workplace, government and society also influences communication. Business organizations and other institutions are required to understand how to communicate effectively with people from other cultures in order to enhance business transactions outside the region, nation, and continent. Especially the multinational organizations should understand the cultural factors and expand their operations to include most major countries in the world. They should ensure successful communication and interaction between cultures, communities, organizations and nations. The organizational leaders and communicators should communicate effectively with people of other cultures or minority groups in order to achieve success in contemporary business management in the age of global economy.

In the present times, people are required to become culturally intelligent by developing a higher level of cultural sensitivity to many dimensions of culture. The people should also become more sensitive to learn more about other cultures and remain mindful of cultural differences. The cultural differences also affect

the communication on account of body positions and moments and views and practices concerning various factors of human relationships (time, space, intimacy and so on) according to Lesikar et.al. (2011:24).

Lehman et. al. (2012:22) have delineated the barriers to intercultural communication such as ethnocentrism, stereotypes, interpretation of time, personal space requirements, touching, body language, translation limitations, commonsense approach, understanding other cultures, cultivation of patience and enlisting help from others. The people wrongly presume that their own cultural norms are universally valued while other cultural norms are not good enough mainly due to ethnocentrism. People of all cultures have stereotypes about other cultural groups they normally encounter. In some cultures people believe that long discussions or negotiations spent in establishing relationships are good exercises. The distance between people occurs while communicating or transacting due to cultural space related perception. The people's tendency to touch also differs by culture and gender. The body language varies from culture to culture since it is not universal. Certain words in one language do not have an equivalent meaning in other languages due to cultural differences. Certain barriers to intercultural communication occur due to absence of commonsense. The organizational leaders and communicators also fail to understand the foundations of other cultures due to inadequate exposure. The communicators also face certain inconvenience while conversing with the people of other cultures due to non-familiarity with the languages. The communicators can also solicit the help of others in order to communicate effectively with the people of other cultures either for clarification or confirmation of certain ideas. Thus, barriers to inter-cultural communication occur under the normal circumstances.

Bhushan (2012) states: "The world today is characterized by an ever growing number of contacts resulting in communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is now recognized that linguistic and cultural knowledge are vital areas that organizations must acquire if they are to integrate, progress and succeed in the modern market place. The corporate houses should also have the capacity to carry the goods and services and market them in the entire civilized world. It is very essential for the business communicators to understand the format, tone and style of business communication which demands several channels, tools and techniques".

Organizations function in the midst of cultural diversity and diversity initiatives are undertaken by modern organizations to help organizational functionaries understand and appreciate the challenges of cultural diversity and avoid miscommunication. Geert Hofstede identified four dimensions of cultural difference namely power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance which are directly associated with intercultural communication. These dimensions are useful in understanding and communicating with people from different cultures in modern multinational corporations. Borden identifies seven intercultural constructs namely—awareness about the cultural environment, cybernetic of culture, competence in language, individual ability to work, cultural literacy, cultural orientation and particularistic and universalistic understanding. The success of intercultural communication primarily depends upon proper understanding of both the cultures.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has become the burning topic in the present times. The process of globalization

has affected all spheres of human life including communication and journalism all over the world. During the last three decades, globalization has affected the media regionally, nationally and internationally. There is commendable expansion of media across the world in the age of globalization. Multi-national corporations have established the media institutions which have become instrument of profit making in the age of globalization.

Scholars have defined globalization differently. Some define it as a set of processes changing the nature of human interaction across a wide range of spheres including the economic, political, social, technological, and environmental. Practically, globalization is perceived as the process of integration of the world community into a common system either economic or social. It essentially means the growing increase in the inter-connectedness and inter-dependences among the world's regions, nations, governments, business and institutions. Some others say, it is a process, which engenders free flow of ideas, people, goods, services and capital thereby fostering integration of economies and societies. The most visible aspect of globalization is the spread of information and communication technologies.

Globalization has been defined as a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding. The traditional constructs of time and space are broken down during the process of globalization, thereby stimulating the renegotiation of societal relationships. Individuals and groups attempt to explain these major shifts and events at local, national, and international levels. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have played a major role in the corporate expansion on an international scale in the age of globalization. The early studies revealed that

a few Western nations controlled the international flow of information.

Giddens (1999:14) has described globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'.

This process of 'globalization' is often portrayed as a positive force which is unifying widely different societies and cultures integrating them into a 'global village', and enriching all in the process. It is variously described as an inevitable by-product of human evolution and progress, as if it were an organic process, governed by the laws of nature. However, globalization is not necessarily a natural progression emerging out of the ordinary communication and interaction of people and cultures around the world. It results from deliberate human choice by a powerful group of nations, transnational corporations (TNCs) and international organizations which have stakes in the process. The new communications and information technologies have provided methods for large corporations to maximize profits by entering foreign markets.

The values of life also change according to the culture of the land. Each culture has different values concerning the attitudes and behavioral patterns of people. The social behavior also where is by culture and cultural differences affect the communication between two groups or nations. There are countless differences in culture and cultural values are regarded as standards for determining the meaning in intercultural communication. The communication techniques also differ from country to country and from region to region. The words derived from culture also present problems from intercultural communication point of view. The colloquialisms also cause problems in cross-cultural correspondence.

In the age of globalization, intercultural communication matters despite certain differences and drawbacks. There is ever growing need for constant communication across cultures. The cultural exchange programmes are becoming imminent in the age of globalization since businesses are becoming increasingly global in their operations. The multi-national corporations have understood the need for communication across cultures in view of their ever increasing business operations. Inter-cultural communication also enables the business organizations to understand the diversified needs of the customers across the globe and fulfill their demands.

Intercultural communication has become inevitable in view of increasing globalization in the new millennium. The people are visiting different countries for education, employment, business and other purposes. Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2011:10) observe: "The new trend in international business is to 'go local'. This creates a work situation in which 'locals' and foreign experts perform together as a team. This necessitates cultural orientation on the part of the visitors so that they are familiar with the host culture, specially the use of habitual expressions and expected behavior in different situations. The process of acculturation is made possible by organizing specialized training of visiting teams in the language and work culture of host organizations. It is also necessary for those in the host country to be respectful and welcoming of their visitors' cultures, so that the interaction can be productive and cordial. Smooth cross-cultural presence in business, industry, or education is possible internationally or intra-nationally only by first developing knowledge and sensitivity of the other culture".

The globalization has offered several opportunities to the mankind to move beyond their culture and country in search of

education, employment, business and other opportunities. The international business organizations have a responsibility of providing employment opportunities to the local people and establish cordial human and business relations. The modern business executives are given orientation formally to develop cultural sensitivity and gain advantages through effective business relationships. Shital Kakker Mehra defines cultural sensitivity as “an ability to interpret unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in the way compatriots of the same culture would”. The executive should also understand how cultural context affects personal behavior and business communication. The gestures are often expressive of cultural context of communication.

NEED FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

The cultural interaction has become an important means of facilitating inter-cultural relations which benefits the people regardless of profession. The cultural mis-understandings bring about conflict of interest and hamper the cultural exchange. Cultural understanding facilitates better business transactions. It is necessary to know the cultural background of individuals and institutions in order to understand each other and respond correctly in intercultural situations. Scholars have identified strong linkage between culture and communication. There are certain characteristics of low-context and high – context cultures which exist in different parts of the world, according to Hall (1959:15). He developed these to concepts while teaching intercultural skills to the foreign service personnel.

The communication system, process and operations are directly related to the culture of the country or region. In particular, the social context in a given culture also determines the attitudes and behaviors of people. The existing

rules, regulations and behavioral norms also represent the social context of culture. The culture has a definite bearing on the communication practices of people. Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2011:11) comment: “In a high – context culture, there are many contextual elements that help individuals understand the rules. Much is taken for granted while communicating. A person who does not know the unwritten rules of the culture may find communication confusing”.

The travelling publics are required to understand the unwritten rules of the culture while interacting with the hosts in times of academic, social, business and other transactions. The high context culture is found in Asia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America and other developing regions of the world. The people in these regions are more likely to be relational, collectivists, intuitive and contemplative. The people also emphasize the interpersonal relationships in these cultures on account of their high-context culture. Hall (1959:15) states that high-context culture consists of people who are collectivists. They prefer group harmony and consensus to individual achievement. The people are also less governed by the reason than by intuition or feelings. The high context communication tends to be more indirect and formal and the words are not as important as the contexts.

In the present times, the new groups of students, researchers, teachers, professionals and others should also learn how to communicate across cultures with different concepts of formal and social behavior, time and space. Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi (2011:11) state: “In a low-context culture, very little is taken for granted. Therefore, explicit statements and explanations are required. The chances of misunderstanding by those outside that culture are minimized”. The people representing the low-context culture normally tend to value rationality, logic, action-oriented

behavior and individualism. They are always guided by facts, figures, regions and realities of life while making decisions. The communicators of low-context culture have certain communication practices which represent clear, concise, efficient, straight forward and objective qualities. They also depend on formalities, procedures, documents, justifications and other norms which represent low-context culture.

The culture of communication also represents polychromic culture and monochromic culture according to Hall (1959:15). In a polychromic culture, human relationships are valued more than time. Polychromic people do not hurry to get things done and they get things done in their own time. In a monochromic culture, human relationships are entirely different and people do things in a sequential manner on the basis of careful planning and scheduling of the work. Monochromic people are known for efficient time management and resource management. Thus, communication differs in both high context and low context cultures.

The cultural analysis assumes great significance in the age of globalization. Since it helps people to understand the individual actions in the context of the type of culture to which he or she belongs. The cultural diversity should also be understood in order to establish meaningful human relationships and effective business relationships in the age of globalization. It is necessary to guard against *ethnocentrism* and develop certain practices of judging the people of other cultures on the basis of acceptable behavioral patterns. It is equally important to avoid ethnocentrism and stereotyping which are formidable barriers to effective intercultural communication. The corporate communicators, business executives, cultural ambassadors and others should be aware of the cultural differences and adapt themselves to the local style of communication while interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In the present times, English language has become a global communicative language and all business communication exercises are carried out in English which has become a primary tool of intercultural and business communication rather than a language. In the international context, the Oxford English has been replaced by simple and unidiomatic form of English which is of great use for intercultural communication endeavors.

English is also widely used for business communication purposes all over the world in the present times. The success of intercultural communication primarily depends on the development of cultural intelligence.

Intercultural communication is necessary while dealing with people from other cultures in order to minimize misunderstandings and maximize sustainable human relationships. No individual in the world is fully aware of everything about all cultures. There are many individuals and professionals who are required to understand the basis of intercultural communication. In particular, successful conduction of business activities in different countries and regions primarily depends on the cultivation of intercultural communication practices. There are well established norms and guidelines which should be understood by the corporate communicators and others who wish to gain new opportunities in the age of globalization. The guidelines for effective intercultural communication are as follows.

RESPECT FOR OTHER CULTURES

All cultures are equally important since they are shaped by the past generations on the basis of their constant observation, understanding and experimentation.

The corporate communicators should never underestimate other cultures and people at any cost. There are people who are culturally affluent even though they are not economically better off. The individuals should also develop cordial human relationships which matter most in business management in the age of competitiveness.

FORWARD LOOKING ATTITUDE

The corporate communicators should also develop a forward looking attitude which facilitates better human relationships development in general and cordial customer relationship management in particular. They should be willing to travel extensively, meet new people, cultivate human relationship and gain the benefit of interaction. In this age, goodwill development assumes great significance. The corporate communicators should not be unwilling to cultivate human relationship which matters most from the points of view of intercultural communication and business communication.

UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE

The corporate communicators should develop sufficient cultural intelligence which enables them to understand different cultures. The success of intercultural communication primarily depends on such cultural intelligence which is a means of human relationship management. The corporate communicators should also understand how cultural contexts affect personal behavior, intercultural communication and business transactions. Scholars have emphasized that smooth intercultural presence in business, industry are education is possible internationally only by developing sensitivity of other culture. They should develop necessary awareness about the clients' cultural sensitivities which results in a positive advantage in business relationships.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

The differences in cultures are seen in the way people from different cultures communicate when they interact with others. The business executives and communicators are also required to obtain formal education in the art and craft of intercultural communication. The communication parameters and practices are the bi-products of cultural heritage which should be correctly grasped by the corporate communicators. The communication context, acceptable communication practices and adoption of local style of communication facilitate better intercultural communication.

OBSERVANCE OF PROTOCOL

Professionalism and protocol matter most in every business transaction across the globe. In many cultures business is taken very seriously. It is better to avoid the use of humor and jokes in the business context since it would belittle the intercultural and business communication exercises. Both the parties should understand the need for application of professional standards of intercultural communication. In particular, the protocol should be observed to the best of the ability of the participants in order to maintain the dignity, decorum and decency in intercultural communication and business contexts.

SLOW AND STEADY COMMUNICATION

The corporate communicators and business executives should basically understand the communication context and setting before establishing rapport with others. They must speak slowly and express things in an intelligible manner so as to make others understand their point of view clearly. Slow and steady communication makes both the parties understand each others points of view and

prepares meaningful grounds for effective human interactions.

IDEA BY IDEA COMMUNICATION

The organizational communicators and executives should not mix up several things when they communicate with other parties in the beginning. They must learn the art of presenting each and every idea one after the other in order to make the other parties grasp all the contents in a cool and calm atmosphere. In intercultural context, it is better to seek clarifications on the spot on the basis of distinct and separate questions and observations.

POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS

The executives and communicators are required to assume the role of cultural ambassadors in intercultural situations. They must be committed to building memorable and fruitful human interactions which benefit the business organizations immensely. Negative questions and observations bring about misunderstandings which hamper human relationships and business transactions. The very presence of negative mindset hinders human relations and creates communication barriers. Hence, positive questions, observations and behaviors would facilitate smooth human relationship development and business promotion activities.

SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE

The executives and communicators should support the other parties while making observations if they don't have good command over the subject or language. Such limitations should be set aside and a congenial atmosphere has to be created in order to facilitate fair intercultural communication. The other parties should be encouraged to express their points of view fully and freely through patient hearing and supportive mannerisms. The presence of

supportive attitude matters most from the point of view of sound intercultural communication.

UNDERSTAND THE ETIQUETTE

Intercultural communication and business communication demands the application of traditional and new media in order to facilitate instant means of communicating, transmitting messages and receiving responses. Certain modes of communication are highly culture specific with regard to language, idiom and style. The executives and communicators are required to understand the medium specific etiquette for effective intercultural business communication. English is the most common language of business across all cultures and e-mails are treated as formal and effective interactive means of communication. The choice of media, formats and contents are also influenced by the culture of the source of communication. It is better to use proper expressions and courtesies in intercultural business communication.

ATTENTIVE TO CUES

The participants of intercultural communication should be conscious of and sensitive to cues that others send out on the spot. The participants should have presence of mind and learn a lot by observing others. It is equally important for the participants to be sensitive to other peoples' religious and dietary restrictions and limitations. The participants should also follow the customs and traditions especially with regard to dining and greeting etiquette.

SPEAK BY TURNS

The participants of intercultural communication should understand that both the parties are equally important from communication point of view. Both the parties should also enjoy the benefit of equal participation in the process of

communication. No party should gain an upper hand and deny the other party opportunity to express fully and freely. It is better to communicate by terms. This means that the participant who is speaking should make his or her point and allow the other party to respond properly. This would make the participants feel that their points of view are heard and understood.

GRASPING THE MEANINGS

In an intercultural communication situation, both the parties are required to grasp each others points of view very clearly and comprehensively. Important concepts, processes and operations should be clearly understood by the participants in order to prevent any confusion or conflict. It is better to cross check certain things if they are not properly grasped by the parties concerned. Clear and complete understanding of men and matters makes into cultural communication accurate and effective.

PREVENTION OF IDIOMS, PHRASES AND SLANGS

It is better to avoid the use of idioms, phrases and slangs which do not have equal meanings in both cultures and communicative settings. These elements create more confusion in the minds of the participants and mislead them intercultural communication situations. Unfamiliar, unknown and complex words should also be conveniently avoided in order to prevent the occurrence of communication gaps. The globalization of business in the modern word demands that people of diverse cultures across the world communicate with one another by using simple terms and sentences.

CONCLUSION

The world is a mixture of races, ethnicities and cultures which has resulted in rich diversity. In

the age of globalization, modern organizations are required to achieve the goal of unity in diversity in order to promote peace, tranquility and progress. Intercultural communication has become a prominent instrument of global unity and integration. The modern business organizations are required to develop meaningful intercultural communication in order to do business on the basis of good human relationships. Modern business organizations accept both parties to come to the table with their best offer.

The business executives and communicators need to be aware of cultural differences and adapt their style of communication when meeting people from different cultural backgrounds which vary in their concern for space and business relationships within it. Intercultural communication basically deals with people from other cultures in a way that minimizes conflict of interest and maximizes rewarding business relationships.

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