



## CROSS CULTURE – A HURDLE IN COMMUNICATION

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### Abstract

All international business activity involves communication. And the managers, executives have to face cross culture differences. Within the international and global business environment, activities such as exchanging information and ideas, decision making, negotiating, motivating, and leading are all based on the ability of managers from one culture to communicate successfully with managers and employees from other cultures. Achieving effective communication is a challenge to managers worldwide even when the workforce is culturally homogeneous, but when one company includes a variety of languages and cultural backgrounds, effective two-way communication becomes even more difficult. Cross-cultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture. Cross-cultural miscommunication occurs when the person from the second culture does not receive the sender's intended message. The greater the differences between the sender's and the receiver's cultures, the greater the chance for cross-cultural miscommunication and to understand the problems of communication among the different culture becomes important to avoid miscommunication. This study aims to take into limelight these problems and suggestions to solve them.

### Introduction

Every activity whether it be personal or business involves communication. In our today's world boundaries between states as well as big distances between particular states do not play a big role anymore. Nearly everyone is able to get in connection with everyone he likes to; not matter what country he lives in, what time it is or with whom he likes to talk and this connection of communication between boundaries is associated with cross culture. This development leads to the arising importance of "Cross Cultural Communication". Thinking about business for example most of all existing companies operate all around the world by now. If a marketing executive from India wants to make profit, he will have to offer his products not only in his home country; he also will have to offer them in other countries also. So for doing his job he has to communicate across cultures. It is the same in many other branches, like politics or movie makers for instance.

It is an evident aspect that communicating across cultures is associated with problems and barriers to communication. The first big problem getting in mind is the language itself; because two communication partners must own one language which both of them are able to speak. But it's not possible that everywhere we get our comfortable language. Aside from this, persons from different countries have also a different cultural background. So they have different values, beliefs and ideologies. Those differences can cause misunderstandings and lead to stereotypes. For communication partners these assumptions are a hard foundation for communication with high effects.

### Cross-Cultural Communication

Communication is the exchange of meaning. Communication includes any behavior that another human being perceives and interprets: it is your understanding of what other mean. Communication includes sending both verbal messages (words) and nonverbal messages (tone of voice, facial expression, behavior, and physical setting). Translating meanings into words and behaviors—that is, into symbols—and back again into meanings is based on a person's cultural background and is not the same for each person. The greater the difference in background between senders and receivers, the greater the difference in meanings attached to particular words and behaviors.

It includes consciously sent messages as well as messages that the sender is totally unaware of sending. Communication therefore involves a complex, multi-layered, dynamic process through which we exchange meaning. Every communication has a message sender and a message receiver. A sent message is never identical to the received message. Why? Communication is indirect; it is a symbolic behavior. Ideas, feelings, and pieces of information cannot be communicated directly but must be externalized or symbolized before being communicated. Encoding describes the producing of a symbol message. Decoding describes the receiving of a message from a symbol. The message sender must encode his or her meaning into a form that the receiver will recognize—that is, into words and behavior. Receivers must then decode the words and behavior—the symbols—back into messages that have meaning for them. And in the cross cultural communication there used to be a lot of possibility of miscommunication because of the difference in perception, belief, norms and most important the way of talking.

#### Example:

*A British boss asked a new, young American employee if he would like to have an early lunch at 11 A.M. each day. The employee answered, "Yeah, that would be great!" The boss, hearing the word yeah instead of the word yes, assumed that the employee was rude, ill-mannered, and disrespectful. The boss responded with a curt, "With that kind of attitude, you may as well forget about lunch!" The employee was bewildered. What had gone wrong? In the process of encoding*

agreement (the meaning) into yeah (a word symbol) and decoding the yeah spoken by a new employee to the boss (a word, behavior, and context symbol), the boss received an entirely different message than the employee had meant to send. Unfortunately, as is the case in most miscommunication, neither the sender nor the receiver was fully aware of what had gone wrong and why.

The above example reflects that there used to be difference in way of reaction and perception to the same thing by cross culture people.

Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. When the sender of a message comes from one culture and the receiver from another, the chances of misperception becomes high. Foreigners see, interpret, and evaluate things differently, and consequently act upon them differently. In approaching cross-cultural situations, one should therefore assume difference until similarity is proven. It is also important to recognize that all behavior makes sense through the eyes of the person behaving and that logic and rationale are culturally relative.

### **Cross-Cultural Misinterpretation**

Interpretation occurs when an individual gives meaning to observations and their relationships; it is the process of making sense out of perceptions. Interpretation organizes our experience to guide our behavior. The interpretation is always based upon the native culture belief and norms and then those belief becomes a hurdle in cross culture communication. Based on our experience, we make assumptions about our perceptions so we will not have to rediscover meanings each time we encounter similar situations. For example, we make assumptions about how doors work, based on our experience of entering and leaving rooms; thus we do not have to relearn each time we have to open a door. Similarly, when we smell smoke, we generally assume there is a fire. We do not have to stop and wonder if the smoke indicates a fire or a flood. Our consistent patterns of interpretation help us to act appropriately and quickly within our day-to-day world. So in this way people interpret the same in other culture even though their interpretation to the same can be different.

### **Cross-Cultural Misevaluation**

Even more than perception and interpretation, cultural conditioning strongly affects evaluation. Evaluation involves judging whether someone or something is good or bad. Cross-culturally, we use our own culture as a standard of measurement, judging that which is like our own culture as normal and good and that which is different as abnormal and bad. Our own culture becomes a self-reference criterion: since no other culture is identical to our own, we judge all other cultures as inferior and these standard results into misevaluation, because other culture cannot result the same standard. Evaluation rarely helps in trying to understand or communicate with people from another culture.

### **Barriers to Effective Multicultural Communication**

Obviously, not all cultures are similar. Some find the daily challenges of responding to another culture to be too stressful and overwhelming. If possible, such individuals will choose to return to their cultural origin; if they cannot do so, various kinds of maladaptive adjustments, or even mental illness, can occur. People misunderstand each other for a wide variety of reasons, and these misunderstandings can occur between people who are culturally similar as well as those who are different and for the communication to be effective it is important that message should be decoded with the perception of the encoder.

However there are some unique issues to consider whenever from different cultural backgrounds come together:

**1. Stereotyping** – The most significant barrier to effective cross-cultural communication is the tendency to categorise and make assumptions about others based on identified characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality socio-economic status examples as job interviews, teachers, store owners... More subtle examples include shying away from people who are culturally different or assuming people will behave a certain way based on their race gender, place of origin or position within an organisation. We stereotype because of our tendency to categorise everything and everyone around us, so we can interact with the world more efficiently. The Social Cognition theory – as Dr. Tyrone A. Holmes describes – states that stereotyping occurs from natural processes we use to understand the world around us.

Cognition approach outlines four, largely unconscious human actions that lead to the creation of stereotypes:

#### **A. Formation of “US” and “THEM” Groups**

The step in the development of stereotypes is the categorisation of people in to two groups: “us” (in-group) and “them” (out-group). This happens all the time, and we often don’t realise it. The groups are formed along a wide variety of diversity dimensions such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, religion, geographic location, family status, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and physical characteristics.

#### **B. Preference for the In-group**

The second step consists of the natural tendency to prefer the group of which one is a member (in-group). It makes sense that we would come to prefer the group that we are constantly a part of. These bonds are usually drawn based on geography and the community.

#### **C. Illusion of Out-group Homogeneity**

The third step is where actual stereotyping takes place. Simply stated, we tend to perceive members of out-group to be more like one another than members of our in-group. This is probably because we have the opportunity to directly experience the diversity within the in-group while we have limited experience interacting with members of the out-group.

That is what leads to making generalisations about members of out-group. Some examples include statements like, “those people all look alike to me”, “they are good dancers”, “they are great at maths, but not very good leaders” and “they are such bad drivers”.

#### **D. Expectancy Confirmation**

Once we develop stereotypes about members of different groups, there is a powerful psychological process at work that leads us to maintain these stereotypes. This process, known as expectancy confirmation, consists of the tendency to use instances when stereotypes are supported as “proof” that the stereotype is valid. And once again, this will often happen unconsciously.

**2. Lack of Understanding** – Another major barrier is the lack of understanding that is frequently present between people from different backgrounds and this barrier is very common among the cross culture people. Because people may have differences in values, beliefs, methods of reasoning, communication styles, work styles, and personality types, communication difficulties will occur. In order to avoid this barrier, each party must have a clear and accurate understanding of the thoughts, feelings, ideas, values, styles, desires and goals of other person and many of us are not very effective at getting to understand the ways in which others may differ.

**3. Judgmental Attitudes** – The third major barrier includes the judgmental attitudes of us have when it comes to interacting with people who are different. Because all the time we interact with other culture people; we set the standard of our culture and compare with it. Most of us would like to believe we are open minded and accepting. But in reality, a great many of us find discomfort with those who are different in terms of values, beliefs and behaviours. We may then evaluate them in a negative light. This is the essence of ethnocentrism, where we evaluate good and bad, right and wrong relative to how closely the values, behaviours and ideas of others mirror our own. We must suspend judgment about their ways, and try to get to understand them from their perspective. But for most of us, this is not as easy as it is stated.

### **Solution to Effective Cross Cultural Communication**

In order to effectively overcome all the barriers which lead to failure in cross cultural communication, the following factors should be critically considered:

**Observation:** It is always best to observe the behaviors of the group and follow their lead. This observation may help in understanding the two; High- and Low-Context Cultures: Communication in high-context cultures depends heavily on the context, or nonverbal aspects of communication; low-context cultures depend more on verbally expressed communication. A highly literate, well-read culture is considered a low-context culture, as it relies heavily on information communicated explicitly by words. Thus it can reduce the possibility of miscommunication.

**Interpreters:** Get to know the interpreter in advance. Your phrasing, accent, pace, and idioms are important to a good interpreter. Review technical terms in advance, because the good interpretation will result into positive feedback from the receiver. Ensure a shared understanding of terms in particular and your message in general before you speak. Speak slowly and clearly. Try to phrase your thoughts into single ideas of two sentences; work this out with the interpreter in advance. Be careful with numbers. Write out important numbers to ensure understanding.

**Nonverbal Communication:** In low-context cultures, such as in academic communities, communication is mostly verbal and written. Very little information in this culture is communicated nonverbally. In high-context cultures, much of the communication process occurs nonverbally and nonverbal communication involves body language and signs, which may be different in different cultures. Body language, status, tonality, relationships, the use of silence, and other factors communicate meaning. Many cultures determine the seriousness of your message by your actions and emotions during your delivery. There still more about body gestures.

**Verbal Communication:** Avoid use of technical phrases, jargon (words that are commonly understood), and acronyms (it is not much serious if the acronyms are broadly used or commonly known for example, UN is mostly understood as the United Nations). The belief should be left at the time of communication that what u know necessarily may not be understand in the same way as u can. So explain the meaning of technical language and acronyms throughout your conversation or presentation. Pause between sentences and ask some questions to ensure listeners understand you. The questions may include, ‘Do you have any questions so far’? Do not wait until the end of your presentation. Do not be afraid to use facial expressions, body language and other signs of emotion to enhance your message.

**Emotional Responses:** Emotional responses will vary among different cultures. As many times expression can reveal those feeling which words cannot. While some cultures will not react emotionally to your messages, others will. Do not become concerned whether there are emotional outbursts during your conversation. Be prepared to compassionately acknowledge the emotional impact that your message may have on your listeners.

Watch your body language. There should not be unnecessary movements. The audience will be checking your body language while your words are being converted into their language. The interpreter will not be able to transmit your inflections and tone, so you must find other ways to communicate your message. Watch their eyes. Watch to see if the interpreter’s words seem to register with them. Avoid humour and jokes. Rely on a pleasant facial expression. Use visuals where possible. A picture really is worth a thousand words; the universal language of pictures can make your job easier. Spend time to let the interpreter become acquainted with your visual material.

### **Tactics for Setting Appropriate Conditions of Intercultural Communication**

Once we have established the prerequisites for understanding intercultural communication issues, we should then seek to remove those barriers from the way of effecting interactions. The When people from diverse cultural backgrounds

come together in one place, the possibility of someone saying or doing something that could offend another, increases significantly. However, there are some things you can do to minimise this possibility.

The major tactics that might be employed for this purpose fall under two categories:

- Removing language which appears to stereotype participants
- Reducing violations of cultural rules during discussions and conversations.

These are some Do's and Don'ts of Intercultural Communication:

1. Don't talk to people in a patronising fashion.
2. Don't make assumptions about people, particularly those who are culturally different from you.
3. Don't assume a culturally different person is an "expert" about his or her cultural group
4. Don't assume a culturally different person is representative of all the members of his or her cultural group
5. Don't ask inappropriate questions or engage in inappropriate behaviours, especially of a personal nature.
6. Don't try to speak or act like a culturally different person just to build a relationship.
7. Do talk to others as equals if they are lower on the organisational chart.
8. Do recognise that cultural differences exist but confirm these differences before you act on them.
9. Do stick to the tasks at hand until you have established an effective relationship
10. Do treat every person you come into contact with as an individual.

## Conclusion

It should be clear by now that inter-culturally competent communicators integrate a wide area of culture-general knowledge into their behavioural repertoires, and they are able to apply that knowledge to the specific cultures with which they interact. If the basic norms of other culture should be studied before interacting then the hurdles can be removed upto an extent. Intercultural communication skills are needed for the development of intercultural competence .And it is a necessary part of people's personal and professional lives. It should also be clear that intercultural communication is a complex and challenging activity. Intercultural competence, although certainly attainable in varying degrees, will elude everyone in at least some intercultural interactions. Although all hurdles of cross-culture communication cannot be overcome but these can be minimized up to an extent.

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