

Intercultural Communication

Tools for the Workplace
and the
Community

Culture

- Culture is the sum total of a way of living; including values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioural norms, and styles of communication which a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment. Culture and the people who are part of it, interact, so that culture is not static.
 - Hoopes and Pusch

Generalized Value Differences

- Formal
- Family, group, village
- Value on being
- Emphasis on spirit
- Holistic perspective
- Friendship-slow
- Past/present
- Indirectness
- Role non-equality

Informal
Individual ID
Value on doing
Emphasis-material
Linear perspective
Friendship-quick
Future Orientation
Directness
Role equality

Generalized Value Differences

- People centered
- Harmony w/nature
- Age valued
- Long range goals
- Group rewards
- Organic/holistic
- Spiritual/mystical
- Cooperative
- Shame based

Task centered
Control of nature
Youth valued
Short range goals
Individual rewards
Mechanical/logical
Rational/linear
Competitive
Guilt based

Intercultural Characteristics

- Assumes cultural differences
- Understands self & own culture
- Understands & is willing to adjust own communication style when necessary
- Is open-minded, non-judgemental, & flexible about others' values & communication styles
- Is not threatened by others' values
- Demonstrates “respect” appropriately
- Is curious & has a good sense of humour!

COMPARE & CONTRAST:

1. Collective and Individual Orientation
2. Indirect and Direct Communication

Collective and Individual Orientation

- Focus on cooperation *Focus on competition
- Group's collective good *Individual achievement
- Self integral to group *Independent of group
- Social interaction focus *Individual action focus
- Bargains for group *Bargains for self

Collective and Individual— Potential Implications for the Workplace

ATTRIBUTING CAUSATION

- COLLECTIVE

- Actions affected by outside forces: “They were late for the session because the bus left without them.” aka, “Situationalism”

- INDIVIDUAL

- Actions due to character or personality: “They were late for the session because they missed the bus.” aka, “Dispositionalism”

Indirect & Direct Communication

INDIRECT

- Metaphors, storytelling
- Inference-making
- Implied info & meaning
- Relationship focus
- Focus on feelings

DIRECT

- *Frank & candid info exchange
- *Task identification & deadlines
- *Direct info & specificity
- *Substantive focus
- *Focus on facts

Indirect & Direct Communication

Potential Implications for the Workplace

SHARING INFORMATION

- **INDIRECT**
 - In general, in collectivist cultures people tell stories to create holistic context. Relationship aspects of negotiation are approached first.
- **DIRECT**
 - In general, in individualistic cultures people ask questions, give answers, face-to-face feedback. Substantive aspects of negotiation are approached first.

Four Basic Intercultural Concepts

- Concept # 1: You can not not communicate.
- Concept # 2: All observed behaviour has a reciprocal component.
- Concept # 3: Our perception has a substantial element of subjectivity.
- Concept # 4: Attribution Theory suggests we interpret events in ways positive to us - negative to “them”.

Tools and Concepts for Increasing Communication and Understanding

- The “Precious Metal” Rules
- The D. I. E. Process
- Three Satisfactions for Successful Cross-Cultural Communication

The “Precious Metal” Rules

GOLDEN RULE

– Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

– SILVER RULE

Do unto yourself as you would have others do unto you.

• LEAD RULE

– If others don’t conform, or do what you think they should do, educate, discipline or punish them.

• PLATINUM RULE

– Do unto others as they would have done unto themselves.

The D.I.E. Process

- Describe
 - facts: see, touch, smell, hear, taste
- Interpret
 - what you think about the facts and/or observations
- Evaluate
 - what you feel about what you think (+ or -)

Three Satisfactions for successful Cross Cultural Communication

PROCEDURAL

– How we're going to talk about what we're going to talk about—where, when, who, and how decisions will be made, etc.

• SUBSTANTIVE

– What we're going to talk about—the issues or agenda, and what we agree upon.

• RELATIONAL

– Participants feel better at conclusion. Deeper level of understanding. Often depends on quality of the first two.

Procedural Benefits

- Provides degree of safety, security, order and predictability
- Creates a setting where people are assured greater respect, fairness, understanding and meaning
- Provides a method where cultural differences can be acknowledged and accommodated
- Measures trustworthiness & builds confidence
- Creates a sense of equity and ownership

Substantive Benefits

- Meeting Agenda has greater degree of ownership and equity.
- Meaningful discussion of workplace concerns is predicated on informed and engaged participants.
- Technical Information & Minutes—distributed universally and timely in appropriate format.
- Every participant addresses her/his issues, complete listing.
- In prioritizing issues, no issue is minimized: full discussion or different venue/time—who determines and how?

Relational Benefits

- Full compliance to terms/conditions more likely
- Workplace sabotage of agreements less likely
- Renewal of disputes less likely
- Costly & time consuming litigation less likely
- People generally feel better
- Personal transformation more likely

Some Intercultural Communication Tips

- Practice “No surprises”- transparency is a goal
- Remember there are no communication “rules” until the parties understand & agree upon them
- All problem-solvers understand two principles:
 - 1) Avoid being exploited
 - 2) Advance own needs/interests
- The successful workplace problem solver understands a third principle:
 - 3) Assist the other person to “win”

Some Intercultural Communication Tips

- Practice being hard on the problem and soft on the people
- 90% of the substantive portion of agreements is reached in the last 10% of the time available
- Learn how to agree to disagree without being disagreeable
- Signing the agreement is not the end of communication, it is the beginning

Working Effectively in Cross-Cultural Consultation Means

Honour, understand and respect differences

Human-to-human relationship most important

Thoughtful communication is best viewed as process
and not an event

