

IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

This study highlights the concept of Cross –cultural communication in detail and the major factors associated with technology enabled communication. Today’s world is considered as the world of technology. With the advent of the internet, the whole world has been transformed into a worldwide town. It has drastically increased business interactions among professionals from different cultures. However, it is observed that cultural differences create barriers in conveying messages correctly. This study focuses on the concept of cross- cultural communication, factors affecting cross- cultural communication and shall get some tips for effective cross-cultural communication. Along with it, we shall also get some insights about technology assisted communication, its tools, advantages and disadvantages.

Keywords: *Cros-Cultural Communication, Technology, Language, Culture context.*

Introduction:

Culture is an umbrella term. It includes customs, traditions, beliefs, socio-economic structures, languages and behavioural patterns of different groups of people having different races, religions and geographical locations. People belonging to their particular culture can easily understand the meanings of verbally and non-verbally communicated messages. But, if two persons having different cultural backgrounds are asked to interact with each other, they face a number of difficulties. Even after using the common language, they cannot understand the meanings of the messages implied through non-verbal cues like body language, posture, gesture, facial expressions, attire, physical appearance, behaviours and so on. It happens so, because various cultures carry different sets of meanings for different behaviours, ways of greetings, postures, gestures, and other non-verbal cues.

Culture influences everything including an individual’s thinking, behaviour, and attitude to look at problems and how to solve them. In different cultures, we find different styles of communication including variations in the contexts of use of words and degree of non-verbal cues. In some cultures, direct context is used. Such variations in use of contexts, words and non- verbal cues play a vital role in cross-cultural communication. If one neglects these cultural variations, one may misunderstand and misinterpret the communication. Such cross-cultural communication may result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations. To avoid such mistakes, let’s get some insights about the major factors that affect cross-cultural communication.

There is always a possibility that due to cultural differences, messages conveyed through verbal and non-verbal cues can be misinterpreted. To avoid such problems, it is always better to take some precautions. They can be termed as the strategies for meaningful cross- cultural communication. Understand the conveyed messages completely. Don’t hurry up to draw conclusions by assuming other people's intentions. It’s better to ask for a re-explanation and confirm the message that you have understood from the discussion. Have proper knowledge of the language which is to be used for communication. There may be differences in spellings or pronunciations of words. It should be

understood clearly. Sometimes, some words or phrases are used in specific contexts so it should not be taken for granted. Assistance of translators who are familiar with the cultures of both the partners in communication can tremendously help to have meaningful communication. People from different cultures may have different styles of communication. Some people prefer to talk directly about the point whereas some people use indirect context for communication. These variables in communication styles should be understood. Appropriate use of communication style and non-verbal cues can help you establish good rapport with the partner in communication.

In cross-cultural communication, sometimes, much attention is focused on differences rather than similarities. It should be understood that ways of interpretation could be different in other party's cultures and they should not be forced to think and interpret messages the way you want. Variations in the perceptions, attitudes, and needs of people should be taken into account while communicating in cross-cultural settings. Cultural identities get reflected through language and behaviours of the partners in communication. Respect the cultural differences and use appropriate language and behaviour that suits the cultural context of the communication. Cultures keep on changing in the flow of time. So, update oneself with the changes in cultures of different countries and follow them while interacting with people from that country.

As stated earlier, there is always a vast scope for misunderstandings and misinterpretations in cross-cultural communication. But by following some strategies one can reduce it to a large extent. In addition to those, one can also follow some tips to make cross-cultural communication more effective and meaningful:

Appropriate use of Language: Use of language includes selection of words, pronunciation, speed and tone. Though English is preferred by many people for cross-cultural communication, everyone cannot have fluency and proficiency like native speakers. So, while using English, it's not good to copy others. Speak at normal speed, maintain clarity and use correct pronunciations.

Improve questioning Skill: Cross-cultural communication takes time to comprehend messages and get replies from the other partner in communication. Therefore, avoid asking double questions like- "Do you want to continue or should we stop here?" Such double questions may not be understood by the person and so it can be a bit difficult for the partner to answer it.

Take a Pause and Go Ahead: Instead of drawing conclusions hurriedly, take a pause wherever you find difficulties in comprehending messages. Discuss it again, listen to the clarification and then go ahead. If you are not clear about any point, note it down and re-discuss it.

Be Cooperative: Comfort level of both the partners in communication is to be maintained. If your partner is not comfortable in use of English, encourage him positively. It will boost his confidence and build trust in you.

Summarize and conclude: Due to cultural differences, sometimes things can be understood wrongly. Therefore, summarize the discussed items before you conclude your communication. Don't assume that your partner has understood everything. Do not end the conversation abruptly.

Avoid colloquial expressions: Avoid colloquial expressions while communicating with parties from other cultures. They could understand the words but could not understand the meanings.

Maintain etiquettes: Every culture has different communication styles and etiquettes. It is always better to know them before the actual communication. Formal training in it can help one to be a better communicator.

Main Thrust:

Technology has become an inseparable part of our personal and professional life. It plays an important role in the cross-cultural communication. Technology connects one person to another, one community to another and one culture from another. It is being used in almost all disciplines. Technology has changed the traditional modes of communication. Nowadays, information is easily and rapidly exchanged through various devices of

telecommunication such as email, fax, voice mails, social networking sites, blog etc. Videoconferencing and distance learning has brought in tremendous changes in functions of business organizations and educational institutes. Through teleconferencing and videoconferencing, people from any part of the world can communicate audio-visually at a rapid speed.

Technology has become a backbone of communication in almost every small and large business organization. Right from attendance of the employees to the presentations of higher authorities, everything is done through various technologies. Internet access to computers and laptops has enabled employees to communicate all the time from any part of the globe. Due to systematic use of technology, many offices have become paperless offices. It has tremendously changed organizational communication and that has resulted in a number of benefits. Therefore, in this chapter, we shall take a speedy review of the technological tools that are used for communication in various business organizations.

Technology-Based Communication Tools:

Telephone and Mobile Phones: The telephone is a great gadget that is used for communication in numerous associations. Earlier, telephones were being used for verbal communication but latest innovations have added audio-visual features to it. On the other hand, cell phones have gained a vital space in our life today. They enable us to call anywhere anytime; but in addition to it, they are stacked with numerous useful applications.

Mobile phones are little computers as they provide access to emails, multimedia, contacts, calendar, games, etc. Any feature can be added to it as per the requirement of the person. There are many advantages of cell phones. The greatest benefit of mobile phones is the ability to contact anyone at any time from any part of the world. It also offers multiple communication options like text message, audio call, video call, call recording etc. It saves time. The Internet can be connected to cell phones and any information can be accessed through it.

Options like banking, appointments, email messaging, redirection and answering facilities, and international access have made mobile phones a pertinent gadget in our life. We all have witnessed the change in use of mobile phones during Covid-19 pandemic times. Earlier, cell phones were considered as distractions in classes but the same device was used for online lectures and examinations. In a nutshell, telephone and cell phones are important tools that are used for communication.

Computers: Computer is not a new word for today's generation. It is an electronic machine that can be used to find information, process, organize and save it. Various functions in computers have made it a basic requirement in all organizations. Its two major types are- desktops and laptops. Desktop is a basic type of computer. It has a keyboard to type. It can be connected to external devices like speakers and printers. Usually, it is fixed at a place. On the other hand, a laptop is a portable computer that works with a battery. All the features of a desktop are included in a laptop. It is easy to carry. Recently launched iPads and Netbook are also very useful technology-based devices that are used for communication in different sectors.

The Internet: The Internet is an international computer network. It can be connected to computers, cell phones and other devices. The Internet is called "network of networks". Use of the internet varies from person to person and company to company and culture to culture. It can be used for basic purposes like electronic communication or seeking information. It can also be used for business purposes. Nowadays, the internet has become an indispensable tool for every professional. It is used for emailing, file sharing, social networking, marketing, education, banking, web conferencing etc. Some of the popular applications of the internet can be discussed as follows:

Email: Email means a mail that is sent and received through the internet. It is also called an 'electronic mail'. It can be sent to anyone who has internet connectivity and an email address. It can be sent from any part of the globe and at any time. It is the fastest medium of communication. An email can contain text, files, images or other attachments that can be sent to one or many recipients at a time.

Blog: A blog means a write up that is commonly written in an informal or conversational style and published on the World Wide Web. Such write ups are called "Posts". It could be on any topic. They are written in a diary-style. Along with write ups, images, links to other blogs, web pages, etc can also be shared in a blog. Bloggers publish their content on their blog and through it they communicate with the readers. It is used as a communication tool. Readers post their comments and give feedback to the posts. A blogger can use different settings to make it more

secure and safe. There could be single author or multi-author blogs. There are different types of blogs: personal blog, collaborative blogs, corporate and organizational blogs etc.

Website: Website means a set of web pages that include multimedia content and published at least on one web server. Websites could be interactive or static and they are designed for different purposes. Websites are also used for communicating information to its visitors. Appearance, content, functionality, usability and search engine optimization are considered as key elements of an effective website.

Today, everyone is digitally connected to one another although they are different in cultures. Technology has provided various tools to bring in tremendous change in the working styles of various associations, business firms and educational institutions. It has immensely increased the speed of communication. In today's technologically interconnected world, every institution prefers to adopt new technology. They have seen numerous positive changes in the overall functioning of organizations and associations. Let's discuss the advantages of technology-enabled communication:

Technology-enabled communication has reduced the distance and culture. It has enabled us to communicate around the world at a rapid speed at any point of time. It is the fastest and easiest medium of communication. The organizational communication becomes more effective as it enables every employee to get access to required data or collect and analyze data whenever required. It also creates a common platform to directly communicate with higher authorities and do the required actions quickly. Due to increased and direct access to information, decision making becomes easier and quicker.

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