# Need for global and cultural awareness

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**Abstract**

Current and future operations and activities are more and more characterized by multinational collaboration, whether providing humanitarian assistance or keeping the peace, a single nation team is not able to work alone. Cultural adaptability and competence can significantly form the basis of a team performance.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural competence, communication, cooperation words.

## 1. Communicative behaviour

Communicative behaviour is always situation conditioned. Generally, there are four distinguished principal functions of a language: personal, interpersonal, referential and imaginative. The personal function refers to a speaker´s or writer´s ability to express his/her innermost thoughts as well as emotions – disappointment, distress, love, joy, anger, sorrow which every human being experiences. The interpersonal function enables us to establish and mediate desirable social and working relationship. This category covers expressions of sympathy, joy at another´s success, the making and breaking of appointments, the right language needed to indicate disagreement, and agreement which we use in everyday situations, which makes living possible.

The language used in directive functions enables us to make suggestions or requests. The referential function of a language is concerned with talking or writing about the immediate environment and about the language itself. The imaginative function refers to the ability to compose poetry, essays or stories in oral or written forms. Language varieties are generally conditioned by three principal factors: geographical factors (dialects), social factors (related to social class, status), and the factors that underlie the several elements contained in the term registers. This term refers to language, which varies according to the

informality or formality of the situation, the topic, work, or profession under discussion, and the mode, i.e., oral or written forms.

# 2. Communicative competence

Communicative competence has become a regular subject of various discussions. Every language program curriculum should always take into account the cognitive and socio-cultural needs of participants. Oral communication takes place in a definite socio-linguistics situation, therefore, both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors must be considered. Extra-linguistic factors, such as the social roles of the participants in a conversation and the time and place of the communication act, will determine the form, and appropriateness of any oral and written message.

What is the importance of cross-cultural competence and its significance in everyday life? What is the purpose of intercultural communication? Since the number of global and multinational corporations, and teams is rising, the need for global and cultural awareness and cross-cultural training is becoming more and more apparent.

The essence of success in understanding lies in a real understanding a counterpart´s culture with its specific values, beliefs, habits and priorities. At the same time language users have to be presents with the way the English language is being used in the 21$^{st}$ century – they can acquire deeper understanding of such areas as formal as well as spoken discourse, and pragmatics, which are essential for users of English. In fact, effective, explicit and unambiguous communications and therefore meaningful and accurate use of appropriate expressions can have its share on success or failure of various negotiations.

It is very important to spend some time on defining and characterizing culture and sub-cultures in more detail. After identifying our own distinctive habits and traditions and contrasting them to peculiar customs of other selected cultures, consequently there should always be discussed the influence of local mentality and religion on values, beliefs and the way of thinking. Progressively, some further facts have to be recognized: the culture dictates what morals are acceptable, how to greet people, when to celebrate holiday, which topics of conversation are tolerable and which are considered taboos, etc. There should always be pointed out that cultures are categorized as high-context and low-context cultures, and there are different approaches to communication and different interpretation of various kinds of communication patterns.

# 3. ´Everyday´ and formal culture

In general, , when we speak about culture, we distinguish two kinds: ´everyday´ culture and formal culture. ´Everyday culture´ involves all aspects of life: the way we think, how we dress, what and how we speak, what and how we

eat, how we govern ourselves, how we gesture, the way we relate to each other, the way we deal with conflicts, how we learn, the way we understand concepts and feelings such as time, sadness, distance, happiness, etc.

Formal culture, on the other hand, is considered the highest creative expression of people and consists of literature, art, architecture, music, etc. It is important to be familiar with both: ´everyday´ culture and formal one.

As culture passes from generation to generation, it permeates every aspect of life, and it is reflected in all we do. Most of us are not aware of the extent of its influence until we come into contact with people from a different culture. Cultures are often associated with groups of people who live in the same area.

Every culture is ethnocentric. It is the belief that one´s culture is somehow superior to the culture of others... The positive side of ethnocentrism is that helps cultures survive. The negative side is the fact it can lead to misunderstanding, and mistrust among members of different cultures. In spite of the fact that our world continues to shrink, many of us still do not know to accept people who are different from us. What happens is that one group of people blames another group for its misfortunes – often violence results. Lack of tolerance among groups from different cultures has brought about conflict among different factions. NATO and UN multinational forces have to step in, to prevent the senseless violence.

We should always remember that communication is a process where participating parties have to develop general skills, which will help them to adapt in any culture; otherwise they might encounter serious problems. In order to succeed in multicultural and multilingual environment, we need to show respect to our partners and keep the frustration from confusing and unfamiliar situations under control. We also have to analyse and learn some basic forms of non-verbal communication, such as cues that express superiority, power, friendliness, distance, feeling, respect, etc.

# 4. Non-verbal signals

Non-verbal signals vary from culture to culture and can be easily misinterpreted: let us mention, e.g., eye contact: impoliteness in Korea, a sign of honesty in Slovakia; personal space: bigger distance among people in the Czech Republic than in Italy.

The solution to the misunderstanding and difficulties arising from cultural differences is not wished for the day when everyone around the world learns to behave according to the same rules. This is as unnecessary as it is unachievable. The answer is to understand and respect cultural differences. This does not mean becoming subservient to the foreign culture: adopting an imitating our foreign partner´s gestures and behaviour risks only appearing ridiculous, but also arousing suspicion about our sincerity. Rather, the secret of dealing with cultural

differences lies in attempting to understand and respect different cultures while remaining faithful to our own.

Personnel assigned to multinational team missions are trained to avoid ethnocentric reactions to people from other cultures and instructed not to judge all other groups according to the standards typical for their society. Hence, they are aware of the fact that denial of cultural specificities may cause a failure to make a favourable business deal. Thus they find cross-cultural competence very beneficial.

# 5. Non-linguistic factors

When people attain a high level of proficiency in a second language, non-linguistic factors may interfere when they communicate with people from their cultures. Since people have different degrees of success in cross-cultural adjustment, researchers have tried to pinpoint characteristics that account for success. Ruben, in an attempt to classify the traits that facilitate acceptance of other cultures, lists these:

1/ capacity to be tolerant,
2/ capacity to be nonjudgmental,
3/ tolerance for ambiguity,
4/ capacity to communicate respect,
5/ capacity to personalize one´s perceptions,
6/ capacity to display empathy,
7/ capacity for turn taking. (Ruben, 1987)

These traits reflect an attitude of being open-minded and flexible.

People who know a little about another culture find it difficult to understand why people from another culture behave in a way different from their own. When we understand and appreciate other cultures, we realize the importance of providing clues to assist people to accept other cultures. Although learning about a second or a third culture is an involved process, an awareness of the process. Although learning about a second or a third culture is an involved process, an awareness of the process can provide insights for improved understanding. Hanvey formulates four levels of cultural awareness related to the process of learning about a culture (Hanvey, 1976). The table shows that when a person knows about another culture from tour books or textbooks, his/her knowledge at level 1 is characterized by stereotypes, facts, and inclination to perceive deficiencies in the culture. The person has many preconceived notions about the other culture.

The knowledge of the person at level 2 is acquired through come cultural contact, e.g., two countries that share a border. Knowledge consists of a shallow understanding of the other culture: at this level, the cultural learner is confused by many differences between the conventions of his/her native culture. The knowledge of a person at level 3 comes through intellectual analysis, and it is

characterized by an in-depth comprehension, but the person keeps his/her own perspective. The knowledge of a person at level 4 is acquired through living in the foreign culture. Knowledge at this level is characterized by empathy: a person learns to identify with the target culture. He/she can walk in the shoes of someone from the target culture.

Levels of cultural awareness

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| Level 1 | Awareness of superficial or very visible cultural traits or stereotypes | Tourism, textbooks | Unbelievable, exotic, bizarre |
| Level 2 | Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one´s own | Culture conflict situations | Unbelievable, frustrating, irrational |
| Level 3 | Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with their own | Intellectual analysis | Believable cognitively |
| Level 4 | Awareness of how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider | Cultural immersion, living in the culture | Believable because of subject familiarity |

On the left-hand part of the table, Hanvey notes that at levels 1 and 2, a person does not understand the other culture enough to accept it. He/she states that "believability is necessary if one group of humans is to accept other members of the biological species as human" (Hanvey, 1976). Thus, according to Hanvey, in order to attain awareness of the culture as highly believable, a learner needs to reach level 4. Other experts, such as Scarcella and Oxford believe that level 2 provides a good foundation or cultural understanding. Moreover, successful learners of a culture feel motivated to continue learning and therefore, may reach an evaluative level of empathy. People without such exposure may not be as inclined to develop understanding for other cultures.

# Conclusion

Within one multinational team, there can be noticed various cultural differences. A team coordination, responsibilities, situation assessment are just a few aspects of team performance that are consistent across teams, whether multinational or not. Individuals usually have significantly different culturally based cognitive biases that influence their behaviour. Considering cognitive biases of others, these behaviours may either enhance or damage team performance. Leaders and other responsible individuals who are able to recognize those biases and understand the implication of a cultures´ impact on

coordination, role assignment, responsibility delegation, etc. are much better prepared to adapt and ensure the missions success.

Multinational team representatives and team themselves must be flexible enough to adapt to various military and everyday requirements of peacekeeping operations, but they must also contend with many government and civilian agencies charged with non-military actions, such as diplomatic, economic and information measures. The aspect of adaptability is becoming more and more important as world forces are gradually transitioning from war-fighting to peacekeeping operations. To respond to unpredictable situations and environments, people must be adaptable, anticipate the unexpected, and be prepared for the unimaginable.

We must keep in mind that there is a cultural reason for behaviours and beliefs. We may not understand them but we should trust that there a reasons why people from different cultures do things the way they do them. We should try and be willing to stop making negative judgements about people from different cultures. Beyond surface differences there is a shared bond: we are all human.

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