

Psychological features in cross-cultural communication

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Abstract

Communication is the most important condition for the society development. Distribution of information causes exchange of ideas, information and personal progress.

It's natural that forms of communication of people from different cultures are different, the reason is that different people have different psychological features

In this essay, I concentrate on possibilities for non-verbal forms of communication (expressions, gestures) with respect on the variety of different cultures. I will try to expose similarities and differences between them and explain causing reasons of psychological features.

Non-verbal communication or body language is an important part of how people communicate, but we should know that non-verbal communication is not universal. Every culture interprets body language, gestures, posture and degree of eye contact differently. In the example above, the poor traveler might have expected that nodding his or her head up and down would indicate yes, but in some countries, it means just the opposite. In the Middle East, nodding the head down indicates agreement, while nodding it up is a sign of disagreement; in Japan, a up-and-down nod might just be a signal that someone is listening.

The truth is that our actions do speak at least as loudly, if not more loudly, than our words.

Keywords: psychological features, cross-cultural communication, non-verbal forms

Cross-cultural communication is a form of communication that aims to share information across different cultures and social groups. It is used to describe the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and culture act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in intercultural business communication argue that

culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted. As a separate notion, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries.

Cross-cultural communication plays a role in social sciences such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology and communication studies. Unfortunately, there could be some problems during intercultural communications. They usually come from problems in message transmission. In communication between people of the same culture, the person who receives the message interprets it based on values, beliefs, and expectations for behaviour similar to those of the person who sent the message. When this happens, the way the message is interpreted by the receiver is likely to be fairly similar to what the speaker intended. However, when the receiver of the message is a person from a different culture, the receiver uses information from his or her culture to interpret the message. The message that the receiver interprets may be very different from what the speaker intended. So if we want to communicate effectively with representatives of other cultures, we have to know their psychological features.

In cross-cultural communication one very important part is nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is behaviour that communicates without words-though it often may accompanied by words. Non-verbal communication or body language is an important part of how people communicate and there are differences from culture to culture. Hand and arm gestures, touch, and eye contact (or its lack) are a few of the aspects of non-verbal communication that may vary significantly depending upon cultural background. I want to show you some examples:

1. The Ring or “OK” gesture. This gesture was popularized in the USA during the early nineteenth century. The “OK” meaning is common to all English-speaking countries and, although its meaning is fast spreading across Europe and Asia, it has other origins and meanings in certain places. In France it also means “zero” or “nothing”: In Japan it can mean money: in some Mediterranean countries it is an orifice signal, often used to infer that a man is homosexual.
2. This sign is popular throughout Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain and carries an “up yours” interpretation. Winston Churchill popularised V for victory sign in World War II,

but his two-fingered version was done with the palm facing out, whereas the palm faces towards the speaker for the obscene insult version. In most parts of Europe, however, the palm facing in version still means “victory” so that Englishman who uses it to tell a European to “get stuffed” could leave the European wondering about what victory the Englishman meant.

3. One common example is the use of a finger or hand to indicate “come here please”. This is the gesture used to beckon dogs in some cultures and is very offensive. Pointing with one finger is also considered to be rude in some cultures and Asians typically use their entire hand to point to something.

In mainstream Western culture, eye contact is interpreted as attentiveness and honesty; we are taught that we should “look people in the eye” when talking. In many cultures, however, including Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American, eye contact is thought to be disrespectful or rude, and lack of eye contact does not mean that a person is not paying attention. Women may especially avoid eye contact with men because it can be taken as a sign of sexual interest.

Cultural factors also affect on Zone distances. Personal space is the distance two people keep between themselves in order to feel comfortable. If the amount of space is too great, the person approaching you will seem cold, shy, or unfriendly. If the amount of space is too small, the person approaching will seem aggressive, rude, or intrusive. Most of the cultures have their own personal distances. In European countries people have an intimate distance of only 20 to 30 centimetres and in some cultures it is even less. Danish couple felt quite at ease and relaxed when standing at a distance of 25 centimetres from the Australians, being totally unaware of their intrusion into the 46- centimetre intimate zone. In Georgia intimate zone is almost similar as it is in Australia (46-55 centimetres).

Facial expressions carry meaning that is determined by situations and relationships. For instance, in American culture the smile is typically an expression of pleasure. Yet it also has other functions. A woman's smile at a police officer does not carry the same meaning as the smile she gives to a young child. A smile may show affection, convey politeness, or disguise true feelings. For example many people in Russia consider smiling at strangers in public to be unusual and even suspicious behaviour. Yet many Americans smile freely at strangers in public places (although this is less common in big cities). Some Russians believe that Americans smile in the wrong places; some Americans believe that Russians don't smile enough. In Southeast Asian cultures, a smile is frequently used to cover emotional pain or

embarrassment. Vietnamese people may tell the sad story of how they had to leave their country but end the story with a smile.

These examples show that cultural misinterpretation of gestures can produce embarrassing results and that a person's cultural background should always be considered before jumping to conclusions about his or her body language or gestures. The world is filled with countless cultures, each with its own ways. Individuals also vary widely within each culture. While the information in this tip sheet can help you move toward a better understanding of your co-workers from other cultures, the most important principle you can learn is that non-verbal behaviour does vary, and that the interpretation of nonverbal cues that seems obvious to you may not be accurate. A skilled cross-cultural communicator does not necessarily know all the rules of the other culture. Successful communication depends on getting to know people as individuals, asking questions, and seeking to understand their perspective before drawing conclusions about their attitudes and intentions.