

CONFLICT-FREE CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Business is not conducted in an identical fashion from culture to culture. Consequently, business relations are enhanced when managerial, sales, and technical personnel are trained to be aware of areas likely to create communication difficulties and conflict across cultures. Problems in business communication conducted across cultures often arise when participants from one culture are unable to understand culturally determined differences in communication practices, traditions, and thought processing.

Culture directly affects the communication process in an international business setting through seven variables:

1. language;
2. environmental and technological considerations;
3. social organization;
4. contexting and face-saving;
5. authority conception;
6. nonverbal communication behavior;
7. time conception.

These seven dimensions of culture are not intended to represent the only cause of intercultural communication difficulties. Being aware of these factors does, however, provide an underlying foundation on which one can construct a framework for understanding the businesspeople from other cultures. In short, these seven factors represent an approach for asking the right questions needed to see the most significant cultural differences and similarities. The answers to those questions vary according to the individual experiences of those involved. [1]

Among the most often cited barriers to conflict-free cross-cultural business communication is the use of different languages. In this context, we would like to consider exactly this problem more thoroughly.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance that an understanding of linguistic differences plays in international business communication. Difficulties with language fall basically into three categories:

1. gross translation problems;

2. culturally-based variations among speakers of the same language;
3. the problems in conveying subtle distinctions from language to language. [1]

Gross translation errors, though frequent, may be less likely to cause conflict between parties than other language difficulties. Yet the most common mistakes in brand names are connected with their translation. If a company has worked for a long time in the home market, and then enters foreign markets, it is very difficult to translate the brand correctly into different languages. Even in the era of globalization, cultural and language differences have not disappeared, but the correct adaptation of the national characteristics of demand is still the key to success in a given market. For example, the world famous company General Motors failed when it tried to launch its new automobile Chevrolet Nova to the markets of Latin America. As it turned out, No Va in Spanish means “Can’t move”.

Dialectical differences within the same language often create gross errors. One frequently cited example of how variations within a single language can affect business occurred when a U.S. deodorant manufacturer sent a Spanish translation of its slogan to their Mexican operations. The slogan read "if you use our deodorant, you won't be embarrassed." The translation, however, which the Mexican-based English-speaking employees saw no reason to avoid, used the term "*embarazada*" to mean "embarrassed." This provided much amusement to the Mexican market, as "*embarazada*" means "pregnant" in Mexican Spanish.

The subtle shadings that are often crucial to business negotiations are also weakened when the parties do not share a similar control of the same language. In English, for example, the mild distinctions between the words "misinterpret" and "misunderstand" can prove significant in a sensitive situation. To a touchy negotiator, to say that he or she "misunderstands" may imply that he or she is dim-witted. To say that same negotiator "misinterprets" a concept, by contrast, allows the negotiator a way to save face since all interpretations are arguable. In such a situation, the term applies more objectively to the matter at hand than to the specific negotiator.

Today understanding and identifying cultural differences is an essential skill for global managers and leaders. Developing cultural self-awareness and effective behavioral strategies to minimize the cultural gaps that occur when contrasting value orientations of different social groups arise is key to working in today's diverse, multicultural business environment. [2]

As business has turned more and more to an integrated world market to meet its needs, the difficulties of communicating at a global level have become increasingly widespread. Still, in a competitive world economy, it is harder for the successful business venture to conduct business exclusively within the safe confines of a single domestic business environment. Consequently, the need for dealing with intercultural differences and cross-cultural communication barriers has grown as well.

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