

LESSON 4: Local and Global Communication in Multicultural Settings



To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.

-Tony Tobbins

A. PREPARING TO COMMUNICATE ACROSS CULTURES

Assess your personal preparedness to communicate effectively with persons of different cultures by labelling each of the following as true or false:

- _____ 1. I enjoy communicating with persons unlike me as much as with persons like me.
- _____ 2. I am equally sensitive to the concerns of all groups in our multicultural society.
- _____ 3. I can tell when persons from other cultures do not understand me or are confused by my action.
- _____ 4. I do not fear interacting with persons from minority groups any more than I fear interacting with persons from the dominant culture.
- _____ 5. Persons from other cultures have a right to be angry at members of my culture.
- _____ 6. Persons from other cultures who don't actively participate in a conversation, dialogue, or debate with others may act that way because of their culture's rules.
- _____ 7. How I handle disagreements with persons from other cultures depends on the situation and the culture(s) they are from.
- _____ 8. My culture is not superior to other cultures.
- _____ 9. I am knowledgeable of how to behave with persons of different cultures.
- _____ 10. I respect the communication rules of cultures other than my own.

The greater the number of statements you labeled true, the more prepared you are to enrich your communication arena by welcoming people from different cultures.

B. Determine the message of this picture. What does it tell us?



Source: <https://www.google.com.ph/search>

Let's Find Out

Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization. It also refers to the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic. When a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture, **cross-cultural communication** takes place. Cross-cultural communication continually involves misunderstanding caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. For example,

Japan's Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda was poor in English language. Hence, one month before going to USA to visit President Barack Obama, he was given some Basic English Conversation training.

The instructor told Yoshihiko, "Prime Minister, when you shake hands with President Obama, please say 'How are you?' "

Then Mr. Obama will say, "I'm fine, and you?"

Now you should say, "Me too."

"Afterwards, we, translators, will do all the work for you."

It looked quite simple and Yoshihiko was quite confident.

When he met President Obama, he mistakenly said, "Who are you?"

*Mr. Obama was obviously shocked but still managed to react with humor:
"Well, I am Michelle's husband, hahahaha..."*

Then Yoshihiko replied confidently, "Me too, hahahaha...haha..."

Source: nairobiwire.com

The above situation mirrors globalization. **Globalization** is the increasing economic, political, and cultural integration and interdependence of diverse cultures---the worldwide integration of humanity. Globalization requires that we pay attention to a related concept---**diversity**--- the recognition and valuing of difference, encompassing such factors as **age, language, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, religion, education, marital status, sexual orientation, and income.**

Effective communication and the ability to understand cultural differences are skills that are deficient in today's society. With the experiences you have shared, answer these questions:

- Do you feel prepared to communicate in a society that is a nation of minorities?
- Do you have the understandings and sensitivity you need to interact in a global community in which other persons may look, act, and think differently than you do?
- Are you ready to embrace diversity?

The workplace environment includes employees and customers with a wide range of needs, interests, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. If cultural diversity is not understood and valued, misunderstandings may occur that negatively affect company success.

Cultural background affects how individuals view the world, what they value, and how they interact with others. The **core cultural dimensions** are ethnicity, race, gender, age, and physical disability.

1. Race and ethnicity

Ethnic refers to a national or racial group while **race** is defined as people who share the same language, history, and characteristics or who have similar physical

characteristics. Definitions of ethnicity and race are difficult to separate. Because race and ethnicity are not clearly defined, someone may label you in a way that you find inaccurate and offensive. Even if unintentional, such labelling can be a barrier to communication. Experiences, beliefs, and values influence interactions with one another and serve as a filter through which message understanding and acceptance or rejection take place.

2. Gender Roles

Within cultural groups, societal expectations affect how men and women interact with one another. For example, in the Middle East holding hands in public is considered proper behavior between friends of the same sex but not between individuals of the opposite sex. Cultural attitudes toward the appropriate roles of men and women vary markedly throughout the world. Although not always true, men and women tend to communicate in different ways.

3. Age Diversity

Individuals' ages and stages of life affect not only how they perceive the world around them and what they value but also how others perceive them. Cultures tend to associate different ages with special roles in society. An individual's life stage affects his or her interests. For example, between 29-34 years old in some cultures, individuals are searching for stability and security and reexamining relationship. Age may affect the message receiver but avoid emphasizing age or age-related activities.

4. Physical Disability

Physical disability usually means use of a wheelchair, a cane, crutches, or a walker or difficulty seeing, hearing, speaking, or performing physical activities. Individuals with physical limitations are sometimes patronized or avoided, usually because of the visibility of their difficulty and a lack of awareness of how to interact with them. First and foremost, a person with disability is a person. They have the same variety of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors as persons without disabilities. Treat people with disabilities with the same dignity and respect as you treat those without disabilities. Talk directly to a person with disability, not to their interpreter, attendant, or other non-disabled person about them. Adults with disabilities are adults and should be treated as such. Do not ask questions about the disability unless it directly relates to a service or assistance you are providing. How they became disabled or even then the exact nature of the disability is personal information which they may not wish to share.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Awareness that miscommunication can arise due to ethnicity, race, gender, age, ability, and other differences such as religions and lifestyles is the first step towards multicultural communication. Greater cultural diversity in the workplace and marketplace increases the need for understanding how cultural background affects

communication. A number of communication barriers exist when you are interacting with people from cultures other than your own.

1. Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism

Cultural relativism compares the values and behaviors of different cultures and usually means judging them against standards of right and wrong for your own culture. This approach to other cultures becomes a barrier when you assume that cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors are wrong if they differ from those of your own culture. **Ethnocentrism** is the inherent belief that your own cultural traditions and values are correct and superior. People around the world are ethnocentric to a degree. Beliefs, values, and behaviors that differ from those of your own culture may seem peculiar, strange, and even wrong. However, as you study different cultures, recognize that there is not just right or wrong way but that different ways can be equally correct.

2. Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of Cultures

Although a particular culture may generally exhibit similar behaviors or characteristics, this does not mean all individuals in that culture are alike. People form **stereotypes** when they assume that behaviors or characteristics typical of a particular culture define all members of that cultural group. Stereotypes result from a limited knowledge of cultural diversity.

Interacting with and learning more about individuals within a culture help dispel stereotypes. An understanding of cultures means being aware that individuals within each culture have similarities and differences. It means responding to people as individuals while recognizing that cultural backgrounds and experiences influence behavior and communication.

3. Discrimination and Harassment

Discrimination is showing favoritism toward or prejudiced rejection of people because of differences. Discriminatory practices include failing to hire or promote individuals from a protected group, making arbitrary or capricious decisions that adversely affect their employment, or failing to treat them with the same dignity and respect reasonably afforded to any human being.

Communication between sexes, especially in the business or formal context, calls for a clear understanding of remarks and actions that could be construed as sexual harassment. **Sexual harassment** is an unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature or with sexual overtones. It may occur for men as well as women and even the members of the LGBT community.

4. Language

Language may be a barrier to communication. An increase multicultural interactions present language challenges. When organizations communicate with large numbers of people who speak languages other than English---- employees, clients, customers, suppliers, and government personnel--- misunderstandings can occur.

Words may have different meanings and connotations in different countries and cultures. For example, when Kentucky Fried Chicken (Krizan, 2014) entered the Chinese market, its slogan “finger lickin’good” came out in translation as “eat your fingers off”! Chinese translation proved difficult for Coca-Cola (Krizan, 2014), which tried to get it right. The first translation was “Ke-kou-ke-la” because it sounds roughly like “Coca-Cola”. After printing thousands of signs, company representatives discovered the phrase meant “bit the wax tadpole” or “female horse tuffed with wax”, depending on the dialect. After researching 40,000 characters, Coca-Cola came up with “ko-kou-ko-le,” which translates roughly to a more appropriate “happiness in the mouth.” In addition, some words and phrases are difficult to translate from one language to another because of mental associations that only native language speakers have for them. For example, if a country does not have baseball teams, it will be difficult for them to translate baseball-related sports expressions.

The first wave of globalization made English the universal language, but current marketing strategies recognize the importance of accommodating geographic or cultural target markets. Corporations are shaping their products for local conditions and producing websites in two or more languages.

- Showing the sole of a shoe means nothing to observers in the United States or Europe. As a result, when visiting Saudi Arabia, the American and European delegates to a conference thought nothing about crossing their legs and pointing their shoes toward the speaker while listening to his presentation. The speaker, however, was horrified. In Muslim cultures, the gesture is perceived as insulting. Similarly, while crossing your legs in the United States indicates you are relaxed, in Korea it is a social faux pas.
- John, who represented the interests of an American multinational corporation, and Yu-Chen, his Japanese counterpart, had difficulty establishing a working relationship. John’s eyeblink rate increased as he became more and more nervous, fearing that his efforts to resolve their misunderstanding had reached an impasse. This only made things worse. Blinking while another person talks is considered normal to North Americans; to Taiwanese it is considered impolite.
- McDonald’s (Krizan, 2014) fast-food chain unintentionally offended thousands of Muslims when it printed an excerpt from the Koran on its

throwaway hamburger bags. Muslims saw this as sacrilegious. The mistake could have been avoided if McDonald's (Krizan, 2014) had displayed greater sensitivity and awareness.

- The Japanese view the business card as an extension of a person, while Americans view it as a business formality and a convenience. Consequently, while the Japanese handle business cards with great care, making certain to put them in safe places. Americans are quick to put them away and thus often end up insulting the Japanese.
- Arabs typically adopt a direct body orientation when communicating. Americans employ a stance that is somewhat less direct and thus often find the communication of Arabs aggressive and unnerving. Arabs and South Americans also tend to gesture vigorously when speaking to others, causing the less physical Americans to construe their behavior as inappropriate and unmannerly. It is common in Middle Eastern cultures for both males and females to physically exaggerate responses, while in the United States emotions are more likely to be suppressed. In Japan, individuals may try to hide or mask certain emotions. It is common among Asian cultures to exhibit reserve and emotional restraint.
- Eye contact preferences also differ across cultures. Americans place a high value on eye-to-eye communication and tend to distrust those who fail to look at them directly. The Japanese, in contrast, believe eye contact over a sustained period of time shows disrespect. Among Asian cultures, too much eye contact is deemed intrusive. Arabs, on the other hand, maintain direct eye contact with those they interact with for prolonged periods.
- Americans tend to value personal achievement and individualism. In contrast, Asian cultures stress group cohesion and loyalty, placing greater emphasis on group rather than individual achievement.

Not understanding cultural differences in nonverbal messages causes communication problems.

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

You can become an effective multicultural communicator if you follow a few simple guidelines. Understanding your own culture, keeping an open mind and respecting differences, adapting to cultural communication patterns, and identifying language differences can improve multicultural interactions.

1. Understand your own culture.

Improve communication with others by increasing awareness of your own culture and its influences on your beliefs, values, and behavior patterns. Recognize that your

cultural background and experiences shape how you think, what you value, and how you communicate. Consider how you might have different beliefs and behaviors if you had been born a member of the opposite sex or a different race or had come to the Philippines from another country such as India, Russia, or Africa.

2. Keep an open mind and respect diversity.

Learn about other cultures, beliefs, and customs without judging them by your own cultural identity and unexamined biases. This is not to suggest that you change your beliefs or disrespect your own culture, but rather that you recognize that cultural values affect beliefs and behaviors and that understanding how others interpret verbal and nonverbal language helps you achieve effective communication. However, avoid accepting stereotypes that assume that characteristics may apply to some people in a particular culture are characteristic of all individuals in that culture. Knowledge of an individual's ethnic or other cultural background is only an initial clue to understanding his or her interests, needs, and values.

3. Identify and adapt to language differences.

If you are communicating with persons from another culture, learn how that culture's verbal and nonverbal languages differ from your own. Observe and learn the meaning of nonverbal communication signals such as facial expressions, social distance for conversing, and hand gestures. Avoid nonverbal signals that may be offensive.

When speaking or writing, alter language and change traditional word usage to avoid language that offends someone. Be sensitive and considerate of other's beliefs. When reading or listening, do not be overly sensitive if good intent is evident. Good judgment and mutual respect should prevail.

About 340 million people speak English as their native language, and speakers of English as a second language may soon outnumber native English speakers. About one-fourth of the world's population speaks English with some level of competence, and an increasing number of people in other countries are learning English. It is the language used in the internet, in business organizations, in telecommunications, and a lot more. This globalization of the language brings it back in somewhat altered forms. Sentence structure, word usage, and spelling from speakers and writers of English as a second language may vary from the form considered technically correct in countries where English is the native language. Variations in pronunciations or articulations may also be noticeable among nonnative speakers of English. These variations should be respected and understood; usage of a second language is not likely to be a perfect match for that of a native speaker or writer. Some sentence structure, word usage may resemble familiar usage and articulations may sound almost close to the native language.

REACTION PAPER

PREPARING TO REACT...ORGANIZING YOUR REACTION PAPER

A **reaction paper** is a form of paper writing which requires close reading of the text that goes beyond the surface meaning. The writer responds to implied ideas, and elaborate, evaluate, and analyze the author's purpose and main points.

The **INTRODUCTION** should contain all the basic information in one or two paragraphs.

- The sentence should give the title, author, and publication you read.
- These sentences give a brief summary of what you read (nutshell).
- It should also include a concise, one sentence focused thesis--- the thesis statement. This is the focused statement of your reaction paper. You agree, disagree, identify, or evaluate.

The **BODY** should contain paragraphs that provide support for your thesis. Each paragraph should contain one idea. Topic sentence should support the thesis, and the final sentence of each paragraph should lead into the next paragraph, TOPIC sentence.

DETAIL --- EXAMPLE--- QUOTATION --- DETAIL --- EXAMPLE --- QUOTATION --- DETAIL --- EXAMPLE --- QUOTATION --- DETAIL --- EXAMPLE --- QUOTATION... Summary sentence.

You can structure your paragraphs
in two ways:

**AUTHOR'S point of view
YOUR point of view**

OR

**AUTHOR'S point of view
in contrast to
YOUR point of view**

The **CONCLUSION** can be a restatement of what you said in your paper. It can also be a comment which focuses your overall reaction. Finally, it can be a prediction of the effects of what you are reacting to. Your conclusion should include NO new information

SUMMARY:

Prewriting

Read the article/ Watch the video and jot down ideas.

- How do you feel about what was said?
- Do you agree or disagree with the author/writer?
 - Have you had any applicable experience?
- Have you read or heard anything that applies to what the writer said in the article/video? Does this evidence support the statements the writer made?

ORGANIZING

- Write the thesis statement first.
- Decide on the key points that will focus your ideas. These will be your topic sentences.
- Develop your ideas by adding examples, quotations, and details to your paragraphs. Make sure the last sentence of each paragraph leads into the next paragraph.
- Check your thesis statement and make sure the topic sentence of each paragraph supports it.
 - Cite sources of your reaction paper.

Let's Reflect

Think about Confucius' statement: ***Human beings draw close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart.*** Share your thoughts to the class.